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APOLOGY OF AYLIFFE

BY

ELLEN OLNEY KIRK



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THE APOLOGY OF AYLIFFE

I

BREAKFAST IN WASHINGTON SQUARE

THE world upon which Ayliffe Grant opened her eyes one February morning was, to her perceptions, a world calculated to dispel all doubts as to whether life were worth living. So many people needed her, — waited and watched for her ; so many events hinged on her coming ; the dullest day gained color and meaning from the fact that she, Ayliffe, was to live through it. At this moment, when her story begins, she lay like Carpaccio's St. Ursula, beneath the high-drawn draperies of her bed, her cheek resting upon the palm of her hand. The door had swung noiselessly on its hinges, and Miss Honor Grant, in gray gown, cap, and fichu, had admitted, not a stern-browed and mailed angel, like the messenger to Ursula, but something dainty, soft-stepping, advancing towards the

bed with a soft rustle which heralded a sudden spring, — in fact, the two angora cats, Colette and Colotte. Ayliffe, recognizing the signal, knew that the night had gone — that the day had come. The caressing pressure, the gentle purr, brushed aside the web of dreams. She drew Colette close, put her hand on Colotte, and began to think of what had happened yesterday, of what was to happen to-day.

She had dined at the Campbells', and afterwards Mrs. Campbell had held her weekly reception. It was Mrs. Campbell's effort to diversify these evenings; to infuse variety into the social monotony to which it was her complaint she was chained, but from which she longed to escape. Sometimes she offered music to her guests; again she set forth her collections of rare curios. Last night the atmosphere had been distinctly literary. Mr. Hughes-Vincent had talked, and Denise Alden had recited "Oh, Monsieur," one of the clever monologues she knew so well how to render.

It was of Denise that Ayliffe was chiefly thinking at this moment, with a jumble of impressions of the girl who with easy, sinu-

ous grace and swift effectiveness was always doing the things that Ayliffe longed to do. Valentine Synnott had taken Ayliffe out to dinner; the two had talked through the meal; and Denise, sitting opposite, silent, bored, languid, yet with fire in her eyes, had watched them both; then, when the ladies withdrew, as they passed into the drawing-room Denise had laid a cool finger on Ayliffe's hot cheek. It was done delicately, but there was irony, innuendo, sarcasm, warning — perhaps, too, a touch of sympathy — in this gesture of Denise's, who was wont to say of herself that she never dared to be spontaneous. And now at the recollection of that tap on her cheek, with its implication that everybody at table knew how well she had enjoyed her talk with Valentine Synnott, Ayliffe blushed again, stirring restlessly on her pillow. Why must the thought of yesterday be always something to turn away from? Let her think, instead, of what was to happen to-day — of Major Coulson's theatre-party and supper. Surely nothing could be pleasanter, — but why, along with the thought of to-day, should come some fancy that jarred with the general harmony?

Oh, yes, — she had either to see Mr. Gale or to write to him.

Other ideas had been something to muse over dreamily, while half awake. This came electrically charged and summoned to immediate action. The sordid needs of life are our surest spur.

Ayliffe started up. Colette and Colotte threw off the spell of the drowsy warmth and half light, ready to let free the effervescence of their spirits, corked up since yesterday. They fought, gamboled, climbed to the top of the canopy, descending with tiger-like springs upon imaginary enemies. They explored each corner of the room, fitted themselves into every possible hiding-place; then, their first exuberance exhausted, and discovering that Ayliffe's toilet was in progress, they set about their own. Colette sprang upon a corner of the dressing-table, fluffed out her fur, and began to polish every hair with her delicate paw and her little pink tongue, rough as a file — expanding her tail meanwhile and flourishing it like a magnificent ostrich plume; but never quite free from mischief, every now and then making a dash at the mass

of bright brown hair in progress of being coiled and braided — evidently establishing feminine relations between herself and Ayliffe. Colotte meanwhile modestly held himself aloof, perching on the arm of the sofa while he burnished his own snowy coat, fixing his eyes on the sparrows hopping from twig to twig of the leafless trees outside, little savage tremors running through him as he sheathed and unsheathed his claws.

It was New York. This was the old Ritter house on Washington Square, and the girl musing at her reflection in the glass was Ayliffe Grant, who lived here with her four aunts. The other self — that is, the visible self that looks out at us from the mirror — sometimes gives us an odd sort of surprise. We need to study it, strike a balance between the real “I” and this counterfeit, establish a link from the image to the conscious entity. For, after all, is not the image the real thing? That is what Ayliffe was saying to herself now. This face, whether beautiful or not beautiful, was still her accepted self; the shell in which she, the original and only Ayliffe Grant, was to spend, not a day, not a night, but

her whole life; in which she was to have and to know joy, sorrow, success, and failure. Not even a pretty face, Ayliffe confessed; for her *beau idéal* was of quite a different type; but since she was luckily not, like the girl in the ballad, obliged to regard it as her chief fortune, she accepted its drawbacks in a spirit of thankfulness that they were no worse.

Colette, her ablutions concluded, walked gingerly about the table, smelling the scent bottles, playing delicately with the begemmed heads of the stick-pins with which the cushion was stocked, then, startled by the image of a cat in the mirror, struck an attitude coquettish and incredulous. Advancing with her head on one side, she stood up on her hind legs, then, pressing her front paws against the glass, drew them down, repeating the action twice, until, finding that the challenge remained unanswered, she vexed herself no more with idle speculation concerning impertinent phenomena, but began to think of her breakfast. For Ayliffe, always alert, rapid, sure, was ready, and down the staircase she and Colette and Colotte descended like the wind.

“More flowers!” said Miss Honor, as her niece entered, pointing to a box by Ayliffe’s empty plate.

Four ladies of different ages between fifty and seventy were seated at the breakfast-table, and Ayliffe kissed each in turn. Four aunts are a happy accident for a girl, and she never ceased to pique herself upon her good luck. Every one must have had a mother, even a father, but aunts—above all, four aunts—are apportioned only to the just. She loved each perfectly in a different way, and if she ever ran counter to their wishes it was from no lack of veneration, but because, being more in touch with the world, she knew it better than they possibly could. Each belonged a little to the old school; each boasted of a pedigree, and although to rest on one’s ancestors for virtues might be a shirking of individual responsibility, Ayliffe reflected with pleasure that she was not only a Grant but a Fairlie, and was connected with the Ritters and the Camerons.

Ten years before, Ayliffe’s mother, just left a widow, had, with her daughter, aged fourteen, taken up her residence with her

sister Dora, Mrs. Alfred Ritter, who, with her sister-in-law, Mrs. Eunice Cameron, *née* Ritter, lived here in the old family place of the Ritters, on Washington Square. Later, when Mrs. Grant became an invalid, her sister-in-law, Honor Grant, came to nurse her, and during the long illness that followed affections and sympathies became so blended and interfused that Miss Honor had ever since been claimed as one of the household. Then there was Miss Polly Cameron, the youngest of the group, — a tall, slim, girl-like woman of five and fifty, with dark, wavy, hair always straying out of bounds, and dark eyes of startling size and brilliancy. Miss Polly had all her life tantalized her friends by a promise, never quite fulfilled, of originality. Mrs. Eunice Cameron had married Miss Polly's only brother, and to the two belonged the Cameron home in Belport, where they all spent their summers.

These gradations of kinship and connection were too fine to be considered other than a hopeless riddle by all but the most familiar friends, and even to these it was a subject of inexhaustible conjecture as to the

source of the income which kept so large a family living handsomely in New York half the year and in Belport the other half. The most curious and the most observant had discovered that the bulk of the family means lay with Ayliffe. Each of the aunts had something to contribute to the general fund. Mrs. Ritter and Mrs. Cameron possessed a life interest in the house in Washington Square, while the country place actually belonged to Polly. Still, it was generally conceded that the four aunts had reason to be thankful that Ayliffe had, besides plenty of money, the affection which led her not only to support them but to humor their tastes, flatter their vanities, and encourage even their coquetries. Who but Ayliffe had brought Mrs. Ritter the angoras from the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, and to Mrs. Cameron the skye terrier Fido? It was Ayliffe as well who had given Polly the Alderney cow for the Belport place, and Miss Honor the pony and phaëton. It would have been strange, indeed, if they had not all adored the girl, even Mrs. Cameron, whose pessimism was rooted not only in logic but in temperament.

Although Fido had growled as Ayliffe entered the dining-room, it was not at Ayliffe, but at Colette and Colotte. Fido had an antipathy to the absurd, and his seriousness ought to have put to shame the trifling of the angoras; but they, posing as humorists, liked to make a joke of the terrier. By intrigue, force, or cajolment they cheated him out of all his domestic comfort, robbing him of his cushion, his saucer of milk, even his cup of cold water, without heart or conscience. One inexhaustible topic of conversation between the four aunts was the comparative sagacity of cats and dogs; another was their niece Ayliffe.

"More flowers!" the girl now said, echoing Miss Honor, as she took off the cover of the box at her plate, and, undoing the wrappings, disclosed a magnificent bunch of Bon Silene roses, each stalk, besides its full bloom, tossing up a spray of buds.

"Still no card?" every one demanded at once.

"Still no card!" Ayliffe answered.

"Of course they come from Kenny Jocelyn," said Mrs. Cameron.

"No, not Kenny," said Ayliffe. "I know

Kenny's taste in roses, — he has no idea beyond Jacqueminots and American Beauties."

"Only this one unknown person sends roses which suggest poetry, romance," observed Miss Polly. "This is the sort of man I worship."

Ayliffe laughed. There was exultation in the tone of her voice and in the way she held up the flowers. "Such stems and buds as these cost money," she observed. "Besides poetry and romance, there is an ability to pay the florist. Now a thrifty woman like you, Polly, ought to discountenance such extravagance."

"I hate your prudence when a man is in love," said Miss Cameron, who had never had a lover, prodigal or niggardly. But Ayliffe was not listening to her. The doorbell had rung, and she heard a voice at the door.

"Why, that is Mr. Gale," she exclaimed, jumping up with the flowers still in her hand and darting into the hall. "Oh, what a delightful surprise!" she said, holding out her hands and the roses as well to the visitor, who stood there irresolute. "I was

thinking of you," she went on. "I wanted to see you."

"Wanted to see me!" repeated Richard Gale, as if in amazement, and shaking both hands and the bunch of roses indifferently. "Evidently, then, you are in some scrape."

He walked on past Ayliffe as if she were a mere impediment in the way, and addressing the aunts in turn explained punctiliously to Mrs. Ritter, who sat at the head of the table, that, as she had once told him to drop in some time to breakfast, he had taken her at her word.

The newcomer, who went distinctively by the name of "Ayliffe's guardian" in the aunts' coterie, was a man of five or six and thirty, with gray eyes, a clean-shaven, quiet, capable face, a muscular, well-built figure, and the general air of a man who does by habit the thing that is set before him, and that effectively, with as few words as may be.

"So somebody has been sending Ayliffe flowers," he now remarked, as he took the chair placed for him between Mrs. Ritter and Miss Honor Grant.

"Somebody, somebody," said Miss Honor,

significantly; "and I think, Mr. Gale, when such beautiful flowers are sent two or three times a week with nobody's name appended, one suspects somebody in particular."

"It does begin to look as if somebody were foolish enough to admire Ayliffe," said Mr. Gale.

"You would never have suspected it," said Ayliffe gayly.

"What I feel about Ayliffe," observed Mrs. Cameron, "is that she allows herself too many admirers. I should prefer to see her with one."

"There is safety in numbers," said Mr. Gale. "But, come now — about how many has she?"

"One for each day of the year and two for holidays," retorted Ayliffe.

"I do not so much object to Mr. Synnott," Mrs. Cameron pursued, "but when it comes to her having Major Coulson and Kenny Jocelyn" —

"Kenny Jocelyn!" said Mr. Gale sharply. "I put my veto on that youth, Ayliffe."

"You may put your veto upon them all," she murmured.

"She never looks at Kenny's flowers ex-

cept to make them useful," said Miss Honor, always jealous for her niece. "But when week after week these have come persistently without any name" —

"That's the man, depend upon it," interrupted Mr. Gale. "It's some homely, shy fellow who longs to woo but would blush to find it fame. I confess it is a relief to see that she has a little attention, for if nobody else sent her flowers I might feel it my duty to ruin myself at the florist's."

"No need of spoiling her any more," said Mrs. Ritter.

"Now, perhaps," struck in Miss Polly, "it is Mr. Gale himself who sends these anonymous roses."

"Oh, no, no, no!" cried Ayliffe ardently. "I should not like to think Mr. Gale wasted time or money in buying flowers for me."

He laughed. "Well, why not?" he demanded.

"I have such a rational idea of you," said Ayliffe. "I like people in different ways. Now I need you on my practical side."

"Your practical side?" repeated Mr.

Gale quizzingly. "If it is your practical side I know best" — He shook his head as if in gravest doubt on the subject.

Ayliffe pretended to put on an air of distress.

"I suppose I am a great trouble."

"Of course you are. A heedless girl is no end of responsibility. The thought of you is always perking up, spoiling my peace of mind. Last night it suddenly occurred to me you would be pining to see the French company, so I set out the first thing this morning and bought some tickets."

Ayliffe gave a cry of delight.

"I was longing to go. I was afraid it was too dear."

"Dear! Do you mean expensive?"

"And I am so poor!" she said in a poignant tone, and with an imploring glance.

"Poor, are you?" He tossed an envelope across the table, which she opened with another ejaculation.

"Four tickets? And all for me? May I invite just whom I like, Mr. Gale?"

"Precisely whom you like — certainly nobody else."

"I really hope, Ayliffe," suggested Mrs.

Ritter, "that you will be polite enough to invite Mr. Gale."

"I certainly hope Ayliffe will not insult me by such politeness," observed that gentleman.

"Mr. Gale is a hardened lawyer," said Ayliffe in the highest spirits. "A hardened lawyer has no romance in his composition, and no person without an ounce of romance shall go to the theatre with me. No, to begin with I shall invite Aunt Honor."

"Who is certain to refuse, you hypocrite!"

"Yes, on the ground of her New England training. She did go to the theatre once. She started out by herself to see Edwin Booth in 'Hamlet,' instead of which she attended a performance of 'The Black Crook.' Since then she has been prejudiced against the drama."

"You see, Mr. Gale," explained Miss Honor in distress, "there was the great poster outside, 'Edwin Booth in "Hamlet."' I did not stop to see that it was only advertised to begin on the following Monday. I simply bought a seat and followed the

crowd. At first I was so surprised, — it seemed so unlike my idea of ‘Hamlet.’ ”

“It was the most fortunate mistake,” said Ayliffe. “It has kept Aunt Honor out of temptation and saved us all no end of money. Of course Aunt Honor will decline. Then I shall ask Aunt Dora, who will say that she has no knowledge of French ; besides, she could never keep awake through the play. Aunt Eunice is afraid of fire, so she would not go for the world. But Polly, Polly will go — Polly is my only chaperone. Aunt Honor cannot be tempted. I tried to induce her to go to Mrs. Lydia Campbell’s last night — but no ! I suspect she stands in awe of these intellectual women.”

“Not in awe,” said Miss Honor, with her head on one side like a sagacious parrot that has weighed its world. “I will confess, Mr. Gale, that when women first began to talk about their vocation and their civic duties, and went in for higher education and took degrees, I did suffer from a conviction that I was left over from a former century of ideas. I remembered that I had worn crinoline and crimping-pins, even a chignon. I said to myself that the day for such as I was

past. But when all at once they took to wearing sleeves like balloons I began to look around; when I saw too that they went on ornamenting themselves with birds and feathers and that the sleeves like barrels faded away and" —

"Left not a wrack behind," suggested Aylyffe.

"I made up my mind," continued Miss Honor, with intense solemnity, "that women had not changed to any alarming degree. No matter what examinations they can pass at a pinch, they are the same old story that I know by heart."

"She looks down upon Lydia Campbell," said Aylyffe. "Polly has to go everywhere. She pretends to chaperone me, but the fact is, Mr. Gale, that it is Polly who requires a chaperone. Let me tell you what happened last night. One of the guests of the evening was Mr. Hughes-Vincent, and he was told to take out Mrs. Craig, the novelist. What did he do but offer his arm to Polly, leaving Mrs. Craig on a sofa growing black in the face. Accordingly Polly posed all through dinner as Mrs. Craig, the novelist."

"But what was I to do?" demanded

Miss Cameron pitifully. "He offered his arm, I accepted it. He took it for granted that I was a clever woman — he did all the talking. When he said he should buy all my books, what was I to do?"

II

AYLIFFE'S GUARDIAN

BREAKFAST was over. The aunts had risen from the table and were now devoting themselves to the morning meal of Fido and the angoras. Mr. Gale had pushed back his chair, but lingered listening to Ayliffe, who, still in her place, with her elbow on the table and her chin resting on the palm of her hand, was telling him about the engagement for that evening. He listened with an air of amusement, but yet his whole look and manner made it evident that in all she said and did he was constantly testing her intellect, calibre, and temper. Ayliffe, on her side, was alive to the fact that she was before a judge, but she had no painful self-consciousness. Kindling to her theme, she let herself be carried away by it, yet rang true even when she trifled. It was to be Major Coulson's theatre party and supper. The major had for years been devoured by

ambition for authorship. He had written stories, a novel, also a play called "The Devil to Pay," which had been offered to Mr. Green, manager of the Sea-Foam, some years ago, just before the theatre took fire and was partly consumed. According to Mr. Green, all the manuscripts were burned, but Major Coulson had always had his doubts, and now, the manager having announced a play in three acts called "The Devil to Pay," the would-be dramatist was persuaded that it was his own production. He had bribed two of the supernumeraries; he had invited one of the minor actors to dine with him, and had heard that the plot hinged on a portrait, that the hero was a painter and the leading lady a brilliant widow. These points coinciding with his own story and characters, the major was certain that his play was to be put upon the stage by the unprincipled manager.

"So he has made up this box party for the opening night," continued Ayliffe. "He is perfectly happy for the first time in his life, and, although not one of us believes that it will turn out to be his play, we humor his delusion."

“To-night?” said Mr. Gale. “Who else is to go?”

“Mrs. Campbell and Denise, the Butler Coulsons and Blanche, Mr. Synnott, and other men,—the major, of course.”

“Denise is Miss Alden, your particular friend?”

“And the most charming girl in the world.”

“Save one, you expect me to say.”

“Indeed!” retorted Ayliffe, with spirit. “If anybody called me the most charming girl in the world I should set him down as profoundly inexperienced.” She heaved a sigh. “I cannot be on such a high level—I am pulled this way and that. If for an hour I live on the heights, I pay for it by descending into the depths.”

“She wears herself out, Mr. Gale,” put in Miss Honor. “I sometimes think the dear girl would never either eat or sleep on her own account. She goes to bed only because we insist. She never wishes to spend the time.”

“The night is a dead loss. It does seem a pity tired nature could not be restored in some more economical way than in unpro-

fitable oblivion. But" — he glanced at her a moment and his brow puckered, — "I don't want you to be too practical, too prosaic, too busy," he said, looking at her intently. She had risen and now came nearer. "I must be going," he said in a low voice. "You wanted something of me?"

"Don't scold," she said.

"I shan't promise. Scolding is my one privilege."

"Oh, no, indeed; you have a great many privileges," she exclaimed, laughing. She had drawn her purse from her pocket. "That contains all I have until next pay-day," she said.

He took it from her and counted the money it contained.

"Six dollars and seventy-five cents," he remarked dryly. "That is a handsome fortune, and April seven weeks off. Any accounts to show?"

"Plenty of accounts that will not account. I paid the bills of our dinner-party yesterday."

"You are so fashionable!"

"The very glass of fashion. We have had two luncheons also, not to say a weekly tea."

Although the aunts could see that Mr. Gale was not really displeased and that Ayliffe was holding her own, they felt obliged to put in a word to help her.

"Ayliffe tries to be economical," Miss Honor said. "The trouble is, Mr. Gale, that so many of our friends are grander people than ourselves, and insensibly their standard of living governs ours a little too much."

"But there was never anybody like Ayliffe for making money go far," said Polly earnestly.

"She has such a gift for society," observed Mrs. Ritter; "and it does seem as if, with her connections, she ought to be able to make a return for the invitations extended to her."

"I hate to have so much time and thought spent on mere effect," said Mrs. Cameron. "But, Mr. Gale, the dinner-party was a masterpiece. Still, she put too much of herself into it all. Next morning the dear girl was obliged to confess that she had hardly closed her eyes."

Ayliffe, still waiting before Mr. Gale, laughed outright as their eyes met.

"Are n't they dears to stand by me?" she said. "Mr. Gale, my pride had a fall getting up that dinner. Let me confess to you." He nodded as if he expected as much. "You see," she continued, "I made out the most elaborate and delightful menu. For had I not attended a cooking-school? You see, the difference between the cost of those made dishes and the charge of a caterer is — enormous."

"Some difference, too, between the amateur croquette and that made by a *chef*. Go on, Ayliffe. I admire your economies!"

"They turned out extravagances," she cried with pretended despair. "We tried my made dishes at luncheon by way of experiment. The aunts were all in tears save Polly, who was stanch. I never shall forget how Polly stood by me. She declared she had never eaten anything so good."

"The croquettes did look a little queer," said Miss Honor.

"They tasted queer," said Mrs. Cameron. "And they were too soft, while the timbales were as hard as rocks."

Mr. Gale was laughing. Colette and Colette, having finished their bread and milk,

were now making advances to him, and meeting no rebuff, one took possession of each knee.

"What happened finally?" he now inquired.

"At four o'clock I rushed out," said Ayliffe, "and ordered in all sorts of things and a man to look after them."

"If one does try to give a dinner-party," murmured Mrs. Ritter plaintively, "it is so painful to sit at the head of the table and see people play with their food instead of eating it."

Mr. Gale had put down the cats, and now rose.

"I hope somebody had a good time at that dinner," he observed. As he spoke he moved toward Ayliffe, and taking her hands, folded between them a roll of bills and her poor little purse.

"Oh, sir," she said, lifting her eyes, "ought I to have it?"

"I thought you held out your hand for alms."

"Alms!" she murmured, straightening every line of her figure and looking at him with a startled glance.

"Of course I was joking. What is your stupid old guardian good for except to fork over dividends?"

"Has there been another dividend? Oh, do tell me" —

"What is there to tell? When dividends are concerned we must take them as we find them and be thankful that we get them at all. You were going to show me your accounts. I love to look at your accounts, Ayliffe."

She darted upstairs.

"Does she spend more than she can afford?" inquired Miss Honor anxiously. "To be sure, we have no jurisdiction" —

"Not at all," said Mr. Gale. "She is young. She enjoys life, and, little as I know about society, I know that one needs to give as well as take."

"And you do not really consider her extravagant?"

"Only when she does not get the worth of her money. There is one question I desire to ask — does she see a good deal of Synnott?"

"Yes."

“Does he pay her particular attentions?”

“I am certain that it is he who sends her the flowers anonymously,” whispered Miss Honor.

Mr. Gale smiled oddly. “Is there nothing definite? Does he come here?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Often?”

“Yes.”

“How often?”

“Very often indeed,” said Miss Honor. “How often should you think, sister Dora?”

Mrs. Ritter, thus appealed to on a question of fact, felt at a loss. Sometimes Mr. Synnott came to the house quite frequently; again his visits fell off.

“Once a week?” Mr. Gale demanded, still with that enigmatic smile on his dark face.

“Oh, much oftener than that, much.”

“Every day?”

“Oh, not quite as often as that, still” —

“I should say, on an average, three times a week,” said Miss Polly.

“Good! I dote on plain facts. Synnott comes to see Aylyffe three times a week. He must have leisure.”

“But,” added Miss Polly, marring the

point of her exactitude by a fatal conscientiousness, "it depends on whether Ayliffe is at home. Of course, if she is all the time going out he does not come so much. But then," she went on luminously, "they meet in society."

Ayliffe had returned, and now handed to Mr. Gale a pretty little volume, bound in red morocco, that he himself had given her. She had, perhaps, heard a fragment of the conversation, for her color had heightened and it seemed impossible for her to raise her eyes.

"I was asking about Synnott, Ayliffe," Mr. Gale observed. "You find him a clever, agreeable acquaintance?"

She looked up; their eyes met, hers answering his with a childish integrity.

"Oh, yes," she said. "I am so glad you consider him clever."

"He is a prodigiously clever man in his way. But it is a pity that he has taken up just the line that he has."

"Literature?"

"I don't call him a literary man. He does a little of everything, and does not put too much heart into any of his performances.

One needs nowadays to be very one-sided to accomplish anything worth having!"

She was looking at him eagerly.

"If he loved his work," Mr. Gale added, with a little gesture — "but his talk runs on money — money — money."

"Do you know him, then?" she inquired, as if taken by surprise.

"I see him at the club. It is always with him, 'What did so and so get for that article?' 'Does his book sell?' 'Is there any money in the thing?' And as for love and marriage, I have heard him say, 'Either a girl has money or she has not.'"

"It is not that he is mercenary," said Ayliffe. "But such a man needs to marry a woman who can give him some freedom from money cares. He needs strength and leisure to do the best that is in him."

"Men with capacity for success don't usually postpone achievement until they have married rich wives," said Gale dryly. He shook hands with the circle of aunts, each of whom had stiffened in demeanor. Ayliffe showed no grievance, but followed him into the hall, feeling that she was in arrears in the expression of gratitude.

"Nobody here wishes me to try my two-inch measure on Valentine Synnott," he said to her. "Yet I don't want you, Ayliffe, to like a shirk, a whimperer, a complainer against the universe."

He had given a clear edge to his hostility toward Synnott's pretensions. Still she did not show that she was wounded.

"I have not thanked you yet, Mr. Gale," she murmured. "I hope you understand that I appreciate your goodness." Still afraid of seeming cold, she put her hand on his sleeve and looked up.

He patted the hand indulgently.

"I understand you very well, Ayliffe," he returned.

"You see my faults clearly. I do not flatter myself that you discern much else in me."

"Sometimes you please me particularly."

"As when, for example?"

He swerved away from the question. "I love to see you with the aunts," he said, his voice dropping. "But they keep you a child among them."

"You wish me to be more mature, more middle-aged?"

"No, I don't—not one bit." He took

her hand from his sleeve, shook it, dropped it, and with a little nod went out of the door.

"Always a certain want of tact," Miss Honor was saying as Ayliffe rejoined the group in the dining-room. "To think of his using the word 'alms'!"

"I am afraid he has that sort of Scotch prudence that makes him wretched to see money spent in making life pleasant," said Mrs. Ritter.

"That was a characteristic hint about Ayliffe's getting the worth of her money," said Miss Honor.

"How he did cross-question us about Mr. Synnott's coming!" observed Miss Polly.

"As if we were in court," said Miss Honor.

"Heaven defend me from that cold, dry sort of a man," said Miss Polly.

Ayliffe had listened, dissatisfied with herself, — almost dissatisfied with the aunts. "But one trusts him," she said.

"Of course one respects him," said Mrs. Ritter, conceding bare respectability. "John Ritter says he makes lots of money, but hoards like a miser."

"He lives plainly, but that is a matter of taste. He belongs to a good club."

"Belongs, but sits by, listens, rarely utters a syllable. I asked John Ritter about him."

"When he does speak he speaks to the point," Ayliffe persisted.

"Almost too much so when he tells tales about a friend of the family like Mr. Synnott," said Polly.

"That was a warning to me," said Ayliffe, the color rushing to her cheeks and the tears to her eyes. "I think he meant it as an intimation that Mr. Synnott wished only to marry a rich girl."

Mrs. Cameron, who had been silent, now opened her lips.

"I never quite understand your money affairs, Ayliffe."

"Mr. Gale does, and that answers the purpose, Aunt Eunice."

"It is all left so vague. Nobody ever has the satisfaction of hearing that you are worth so much, or so much. Then, how your income varies! If you stay at home and do nothing in particular you never have too much, but when you and Polly went to Europe for six months, you had enough."

"My income is like the magic umbrella which, just large enough to cover a person, at need could stretch out and shelter an army."

"Better not stretch it too far," said Miss Honor with her decisive little nod. Not that she entertained apprehensions, but because warnings, like grains of mustard seed, may be sown along the highway of life to advantage.

"I sometimes fear," pursued Mrs. Cameron in a sepulchral voice, "that Mr. Gale speculates."

"Mr. Gale speculate!" repeated Ayliffe incredulously. "He is the busiest lawyer in New York. He has no time to speculate."

Still a certain residue of doubt from Mrs. Cameron's words remained with Ayliffe. She had grown up with the idea that she was an heiress, but shaping itself little by little out of a thousand different perceptions had come a wish to understand just what her possessions in life were.

She needed to touch and handle.

Richard Gale also liked to test his facts before he put his stamp on them, and it may have been from the impulse to see with his

own eyes and hear with his own ears that he entered the Sea-Foam Theatre that evening and took a seat in the parquet. In spite of his having for years held a responsible position toward Aylyffe Grant, his orbit and hers intersected only in the farthest reaches of their ellipses. More than ten years before, Richard Gale had been sent by Mr. Birckhead (in whose office he had studied law and in whose practice he was just beginning to share as junior partner) to Los Angeles to bring the widow of Townsend Grant and her daughter back to New York. Through the long journey eastward that daughter, a slim, imperious girl of fourteen, thrilling with a sense of ardent responsibility toward her mother, had revealed her individuality to Gale with indescribable piquancy. His was no facile nature; he had a painful sense of his own hardness and savagery. His struggles with real life had inspired him with anything rather than optimistic sentiments. Experience had acquainted him with low motives, trickeries, and petty spite. Thus at first he had been ready to interpret the frequent protest in the girl's manner as disdain. When his plans clashed with hers she had

made him feel that she considered herself his captive, not his ally. He had not disliked her attitude of resistance ; his emotional nature had found pleasure in every concession he wrested from her. Before they were a quarter of the way across the continent Gale had assumed certain duties toward Mrs. Grant which Ayliffe had at first insisted on performing herself. He asserted that Ayliffe should have more freedom. That she fretted against his curb he knew, — the painful inference that her little splutters of temper and insubordination showed that he had inspired intense dislike he was at last obliged to accept. Few people had ever liked him, he said to himself with an effort at philosophy, supposing that it was merely for the matter of the journey. As it turned out, he and Ayliffe were to see a good deal more of each other. So long as Mr. Birckhead lived he had of course been trustee for both mother and daughter, and had fostered the most exotic tastes and instincts in the girl. When Mr. Birckhead died, the guardianship fell to Gale. Had he had his own way, his effort might have been to brace her for real life. But he had never had his own way.

Up to the present time, surrounded, guarded, worshiped as she had been by her environment of aunts, she had had no love affairs. Gale had begun, however, to be anxious about Synnott, and, wishing to see the two together, had come to the theatre.

III

MAJOR COULSON'S THEATRE PARTY

No sooner had Gale taken his seat than Major Coulson's party entered the box at his right hand. He could gaze freely. They were all talking to each other, apparently with absolute unconsciousness of spectators and auditors. There were five ladies: two matrons, Mrs. Coulson and Mrs. Campbell, and besides Ayliffe two girls, one of whom, the elder, Gale instantly identified as Miss Alden, Ayliffe's most intimate friend. Ayliffe sat down where she could not see him, but he took pleasure in watching her, exulting a little that she was dressed as if to please him in a high gown of pale blue. How pretty, delicate, yet full of fire she was, and how distinctively herself! When he saw her lips move as she turned to somebody behind her, Gale felt as if he knew what she was saying. He did not particularly care that it was Valentine Synnott who

bent forward and listened. How different Aylyffe was from the girl beside her, who, leaning forward, let her eyes search the audience. Gale, feeling secure of not being observed, studied Miss Alden closely. The two girls were in sharp contrast. Aylyffe charmed like a lovely flower, a melodious strain of music, — all was complete, in harmony. Denise gave a perpetual shock of surprise. Her hair was reddish gold, her lashes brown, her eyes almost black. There was a curious charm about her glance, but her mouth, when in repose, looked half tragic.

That there was something electrical about Denise, Gale soon discovered. She felt his gaze, perhaps, for she turned, glanced at him, and he almost started. With a sense of his indiscretion in staring so unreservedly into the box he would have transferred his attention to the play-bill, but could not help perceiving that Miss Alden had whispered to Aylyffe, who leaned forward with a bright blush which in some way communicated itself to him. In another moment he felt a tap on his shoulder, and looking up saw Major Coulson, who was leaning over from the aisle and addressing him.

"We want you, Gale," said the major. "No refusing. It's quite imperative. I'm under orders from my sister, Mrs. Coulson, to bring you. She sent me because the other night she dispatched an usher and he got hold of the wrong man, — just the one she did not want."

Major Coulson, whose title meant nothing dangerously warlike, but was useful in distinguishing him from brothers, uncles, and cousins, was a little man with curly dark hair, blue eyes, and a closely clipped beard trimmed to a point. Richard Gale, who knew him in a way, at first demurred, then, when the invitation was pressed, followed him to the box. Ayliffe, who had risen, looked at her guardian with some timidity as he entered, and experienced some relief when he glanced at her with a smile which seemed to flash out of his clear, dark face like a sword out of its sheath. Ayliffe's welcome was hardly needed. Mrs. Butler Coulson found the lawyer a welcome addition to her party, introduced him to her daughter Blanche, to Mrs. Campbell, to Denise Alden, and informed him that they had come to do honor to Geoff's play.

"Oh, hush!" said Major Coulson.

"We are so proud of Geoff just now," Mrs. Coulson proceeded imperturbably. "I am so glad that I married into the family. I have heard that dramatic authors receive at least fifty dollars a night. We have been calculating that with six nights a week and at least one *matinée* it will come to three hundred and fifty dollars a week; that is fifteen hundred and twenty dollars a month and eighteen thousand dollars a year. The question is what Geoff is to do with all that money."

"To-morrow the critics will begin," suggested Valentine Synnott. "Better wait for their verdict."

"Better wait and see if it is actually my play," murmured Major Coulson plaintively.

"I'm afraid to wait," retorted his sister-in-law. "It's safer to grab at the bird in the bush. Somehow Geoff's birds are never in hand."

"A bird in the bush sings, at all events," remarked Ayliffe, "but who ever heard a note from a bird in one's hand?"

"I like to revel in imagination," pursued

Mrs. Coulson. "I keep thinking what Geoff can do for his family with all that money. Blanche and I have almost decided that he shall buy a yacht."

"I suppose, Major, you know that when the curtain goes down after the last act the author will be called out," said Valentine Synnott. "Of course you have prepared a speech."

"Not the least word," returned the major with a shudder.

"Oh, it is far better to have it entirely spontaneous," said Ayliffe. "Let it bubble up. The only thing necessary is to have a clear idea and give it a graceful turn."

"There comes the orchestra," said Synnott. "By the way, Major, how did your play begin?"

"There are two servants on the stage and they are discussing the merits of the portrait of their mistress on the easel. She is a widow — Claire Belmont I called her. She is in love with the artist. Green has changed the names, at all events."

It was Denise Alden who had begged Mrs. Coulson to send for Mr. Gale, and Ayliffe now observed with some relief that

as the men settled into the chairs her guardian took the seat behind that of Denise at a convenient angle, so that she could turn, look at, and talk to him.

The overture was galloped through. The bell rang. Up went the curtain. All the members of the little party leaned forward in their chairs, quite breathless with interest.

"By Jove, it *is* your play," exclaimed Synnott in surprise, staring at the major, who, pale as death, turned to the rear of the box and sank down, unable to command his emotions.

It was the traditional opening scene. A smart soubrette giving touches to the boudoir entertained with an account of her mistress's caprices the manservant who had brought a note and was waiting for an answer. At the left of the stage was an easel holding an unfinished portrait. Its completion depended on the complaisance of Lady Florence, who had, to begin with, smiled on and encouraged the artist, then turned to a newer conquest. The painter at present was jealous and rested his hand.

"But after all, is it mine?" whispered the major in Synnott's ear; for after a

moment of belief he had suffered a reaction of excruciating suspense and had dashed forward to reconnoitre.

“Can’t you be sure?”

“I can’t seem to recollect that part,” said the major doubtfully. But in another minute he exclaimed, “Oh, yes, it’s certainly mine” — and once more rushed to cover.

However, it turned out to be not his play at all, just as everybody had been certain from the first, and at the end of the opening act he went around shaking hands with one after the other.

“It’s an enormous relief,” he declared. “You really can’t think how I felt for a few minutes.”

They all congratulated him except Mrs. Coulson, who said she was the victim of misplaced confidence. She wanted that eighteen thousand dollars a year in the family. However, it was a dreadfully stupid play, they all told him, and so badly acted. The first lady seemed to have studied nothing but the management of her train, which she coiled round in spirals. Everybody’s spirits went up like the major’s, who,

having missed the fruition of his hopes, had also missed the after-stabs of the critics, and they all adjourned with lightness of heart to the supper which awaited them in the "Red-room" of a great café. It must be confessed that Ayliffe, conscious that Mr. Gale was almost for the first time observing her in her usual environment, saw with his eyes, heard with his ears, and dreaded his criticism. The Coulsons carried an easy jollity into all their ways and doings, and now they had made everybody sit down at the round table, lighted by candles with crimson shades, and adorned with red carnations, without any regard for precedence. Ayliffe thus found herself between Major Coulson and Mr. Synnott, while Mr. Gale was exactly opposite, sitting between a stray middle-aged Coulson and Denise Alden. In any case Ayliffe would have been conscious of her guardian's observation, but the morning's conversation had roused fresh susceptibilities. Her instinct, sounding Synnott through and through, seemed to detect a possible hardness, contrariety, and deficiency of feeling in him. She had never thought of so measuring him before. He

fell into the seat beside Ayliffe with the air of its being conceded to him, but seemed a trifle absent in mind. His glance rested on Denise.

"She is always a cat when she sees a mouse," he whispered in Ayliffe's ear, which suggestion put her guardian in a new light. She had never thought of him except as an adverse power to be borne with, if possible, to be conciliated and humored. Now that she perceived that in her supple, various, and engaging way Denise had at once enabled Mr. Gale to take his place in the intimate coterie as if he belonged to it, Ayliffe was half jealous, and blamed the stubborn stuff in herself which made impossible that easy social mastery that was in Denise an art, yet was beyond the reach of art.

"After all," said Major Coulson, expanding under the influence of the pretty table with its flowers and lights, "it is the luckiest night of my life. I came near to having a play of my own produced, and I have actually got you all here to take supper with me."

"What I am wondering is," suggested Mrs. Coulson, "since the play turns out *not*

to be Geoff's and there is no fifty dollars coming in every night, who is to pay for this supper?"

"I shall go round with the hat presently, after you have had a bottle or two of champagne to warm you up," returned the major. "It is a comfort we have one solid man here. The moment my eye fell on Gale I said to myself, 'Let me get hold of Gale. I can fall back on him!' Synnott wears handsomer studs, but who knows what they would bring?"

"Shabby Bohemian that I am, you will not get even my paste diamonds out of me. Gale is your man."

Ayliffe, aghast, glanced at her guardian, who at the same moment glanced at her. He was smiling, and evidently did not find the nonsense wholly unbearable.

"Always have some loophole of escape," continued the major. "I have heard of a man who when he engages himself to a girl always does it on a Friday and gives her an opal ring. Opals are so unlucky, you know. The ring has come back to him nine times. It is a fortune in itself."

"Some men are born lucky," said Syn-

nott. "If I were to give a young woman an opal engagement ring my ill fortune would wait until after marriage. How delightful to be engaged nine times — but what man in his senses would want nine wives?"

"Fancy nine milliners' bills in a morning."

"At any rate, now that Geoff's play has not come off he cannot afford to have even one wife," said Mrs. Coulson, whose mind ran on her grievance. "I didn't want Geoff to become an object with the fair sex, but I did want a successful dramatist in the family. I wish I knew one."

"There he is!" said Miss Alden, pointing to Synnott.

"I who sit here have had plays accepted, played for hundreds of nights," said Synnott. Everybody exclaimed in surprise. "Of course you are incredulous. You think it ought to have made my fortune, when it is a palpable fact that it is not made. It was Green who took my first. He sent for me. I opened his door palpitating with pride and expectation. There were three scenes in my play which I considered unequaled in

dramatic literature. Shakespeare was limited by his period; I was three hundred years more experienced than Shakespeare. 'Yes,' said Green, running his hand through his shock of hair, 'I think we might try it. There is some "go" in it, and we will infuse a little more.' 'How about the style?' I asked modestly, yet swelling with importance. 'Oh, style,' said Green, — 'there's no style nowadays, and nobody would care to bother about it if there were any. The mounting is the thing. Of course you understand I've plenty of changes to suggest. To begin with, your play, as it stands, is twice too long. You will see what I have run my blue pencil through — all that is to be cut out, and where I've used the red pencil, that is to be condensed. Just take it home, study it up, piece it together, and bring it back in a week.' I took it home; I studied the pencil marks. He had cut out my first good scene, he had cut out my second good scene, he had cut out my third good scene. What was left seemed to me a mere shapeless torso, arms and legs all gone. Even that was not enough. Every speech was exactly twice too long, — it must be made crisp."

"Did you make the changes he required?"

"Am I a millionaire? Do I dictate to the world? Of course I made the changes he required."

"Was the thing played?"

"Hundreds, thousands of nights, as a curtain-lifter. It lasted thirty minutes."

"Did you make much money by it?"

"I dare say a little. I have lived on, otherwise I might have starved."

Having thus contributed to the general talk, Synnott turned to Ayliffe and asked, in a voice which reached only her ear, "What sort of a man is Richard Gale?"

"I thought you knew him."

"Only to pass a word with at the club. I never saw him before in women's society. Among men he passes for a hard-working lawyer, a quiet fellow, but observant, quick to catch anybody up in an inaccuracy, and who can say things to the point."

"I should say that described him," answered Ayliffe.

"But not as you see him to-night," said Synnott significantly. For Denise had set Gale to talking.

"She is so clever," Ayliffe murmured.

"Her cleverness lies in the flutter of the eyelids, the curve of the lips. It amuses me to see a cut-and-dried lawyer under the charm. I had fancied he was a man of too few ideas."

"I hope you don't mean me, Synnott," said Major Coulson, breaking in. "Am I the man you find lacking in ideas?"

"Who wants ideas?" said Synnott, turning back to the table. "An idea is so misleading. Give yourself up to an idea and you may become an Ibsen."

To speak of Ibsen before Mrs. Campbell was to start an inexhaustible topic, and Synnott turned back to Ayliffe.

"He is your guardian, I think," said he, still talking of Gale.

"I am too old really to have a guardian. He manages my affairs."

"Well, I suppose?"

"Admirably. I know very little about them."

"Your father's interests lay chiefly in mines and timber lands on the Pacific coast, I have heard," said Synnott, in his low, clear, trained voice.

“Yes; he was a lawyer here in New York. He and Mr. John Birckhead were partners, cousins as well. My father was very ill of pneumonia. It left him delicate, and when I was three years old the doctors ordered him to Colorado. He was never quite strong again, but took up various enterprises. When I was fourteen he died very suddenly, leaving his affairs unsettled. I remember Mr. Birckhead’s telling my mother that if my father could have lived five years he might have been a very rich man.”

Synnott listened, and his cold, rather weary face lighted up. He was a man of sterling good looks, — blonde, tall, broad-shouldered, and with the air of being at ease in his world and a part of it. Nothing could be more foreign to his aptitudes and temper than being a poor man. He put several questions to Ayliffe concerning her father’s investments, eliciting the fact that Townsend Grant had bought, besides considerable mining and timber lands, a whole township in southern California.

“It is such a relief to hear of such easy, natural methods of growing rich,” he said almost with enthusiasm, — “like the sweep

of the tides, the movement of the stars in their courses. It sometimes seems to me," he went on, his voice taking a different tone, "that I am the only man who has to *earn* money. Application, industry, talent, genius—they are old-fashioned terms. Nowadays money is *won*. Just the same in literature as on the street, success is an affair of establishing a monopoly, of rigging and cornering the market, of creating a demand, of forcing the material to answer it. Do you wonder that I hate my profession?"

"Do not say it."

"I am thirty-seven years old," he went on, almost with vehemence, but always in that same fine, clear voice which addressed her ear and hers only. "I have worked hard, and for what? When I began I liked to feel that in art, literature, and society I had only to observe, feel, catch, and focus my impressions. Nowadays I seem to have lost the faculty of being pleased. Besides, I have the feeling of having repeated myself endlessly."

"But in criticism a man needs to repeat himself. Poe used his good things over and over."

“When a man does it you may be certain his well of fresh ideas has run dry. The joy of work lies in writing what no man has felt or uttered before, — certainly what one has never said one’s self.”

“You work too hard. You need more recreation.”

“I don’t work enough. I shall have to free myself from social life — turn hermit. I used to flatter my gluttony by the belief that I found inspiration and stimulus from seeing fine houses, eating good dinners, chatting with pretty women, sitting in rich men’s libraries and picture galleries. The fact is, nothing is so idealess as smart society. If it were all mere vanity and self-display, one could look on and be amused; what makes it utterly nugatory is its pretension to intelligence and sentiment.”

“You enjoy literary people better.”

“I enjoy only one thing,” said Synnott. But, although he thought he spoke in the lowest possible tone, the last dribble of talk having died away, his words were distinctly audible all round the table, and both he and Ayliffe became aware that everybody was smiling. “I enjoy only one thing,”

Synnott repeated emphatically, looking first at one and then another.

"And what is that?" said Mrs. Coulson laughing.

"A little supper party like this, with such a capital *chaud-froid* as that you have given us," said Synnott.

Everybody laughed outright, as if he had said something witty. As they rose from the table Mr. Gale came over to Ayliffe and asked how she was going home. She explained that Mrs. Campbell and Denise had brought her, and that they would take care of her.

"Have you enjoyed it?" she asked him, half shyly.

"Shall I tell you that I never enjoyed anything so much?"

"I promise to believe you."

"Well, good-night," he said, shaking hands with her. "I need not ask whether *you* have enjoyed it."

IV

DENISE IN HER STUDIO

"COME to the studio to-morrow and talk everything over," Denise had said to Ayliffe as they parted after the theatre party. For Denise Alden had a studio in the neighborhood of Union Square. She was a little less than thirty years old, but had, in the decade between her coming out and the present time, compassed a considerable experience. Every one who saw the young girl in her first season waltzing with Geoffrey Coulson (for in those days the major was younger and the best leader of the german in New York) like the comet-like creature she was, dragging a long, slim train of white tulle behind her, and her great eyes alight with the joy of music and motion, was ready to predict great social success for Denise. But after her third winter she gave up society altogether. It was not enough for the girl. Indeed, so far nothing had sufficed her.

Any single state of mind was so patched and seamed with other feelings and images belonging to some other state of mind that she was constantly anatomizing what she had hitherto accepted, and hungrily taking up something else. After being a pretty, vivid, impressionable girl, then next a fashionable girl, she went to England and spent two years at Girton, intending later to take a degree at Zurich. Her aunt, Mrs. Lydia Campbell, however, wanted Denise for her companion in a trip to India, Japan, and round the world. After their return aunt and niece wrote a book about their tour which everybody read. The degree at Zurich was supposed to be only postponed; but, happening to go to Florence, Denise had been converted to art by a young painter with a Raphaelesque face, who with a frenzy of ardor was copying every work attributed to Giorgione. This young fellow had first arrested her attention as he passed her on the staircase of the Uffizi, bounding up, scarcely touching the ground as he took three stairs at a time. Later, coming upon him before the "Venetian Warrior," she had watched him, fascinated, as with devouring

energy he transferred the figure to his own canvas. Then a few days later, when he was painting "The Concert" at the Pitti, she had addressed him, telling him she would like to buy his copy. His name was Paul Gavin, and he was a Frenchman. He was little more than a boy, but he had so well managed to inoculate Denise with a sudden desire to develop her own artistic powers that she insisted on settling down in Paris for two years and studying in one of Julian's studios. She loved art, although it had not been the first and last word with her, as it is to the true artist. She liked her life in Paris so well that it had been only by cajolery, by bribes, and by authority that her uncle, Thomas Campbell, her mother's brother, had induced her to return to New York. He and his wife had fitted up this studio at the top of a tall building, accepting the girl's artistic occupations as the apology for the modern feminine restlessness and desire for independence.

The studio was extremely pretty, with its teak-wood furniture, its Eastern rugs, tapestries, and cushions. Nevertheless, it was perhaps the sketches covering the walls

which gave the place its real *cachet* of distinction. Once, when Denise was spending the early autumn at Fontainebleau, Mrs. Campbell had given her a birthday fête, to which all the painters she knew and all her student friends had been invited. Each guest brought a picture. Few were finished, — some were the merest sketches; not one, perhaps, was signed by a name that meant much in the market; not a few of them were mere echoes of the masters, and owed their lease of life to Corot, Daubigny, Cazin, or Whistler. A twilight piece represented boats at a landing, the river reflecting the sunset, while the eastern sky held a single faint, rosy touch. There were glimpses of Belgian wheat fields, and a long, flat stretch of road edged with poplars, along which traveled a peasant laden with fagots. One was a meadow yellow with colza blossoms, the next a misty, blurred olive orchard; there was more than one picture of the Venetian lagoons. On one canvas was a woman sitting by the window in a dark kitchen shredding vegetables; then in another a pearly landscape was emerging, while a spent storm was vanishing among the hills.

These reflections, as in a mirror, of Old World life were interspersed with Denise's own character sketches. She possessed a knack of seizing a spirited likeness with a few bold strokes, but her finished work was faulty. Something individual, harsh, bizarre, exaggerated, pleased her better than the normal. For example, she had never tried to paint Ayliffe, but each of the aunts had sat to her, also Fido and the cats, and their images adorned the walls. Naturally, Denise's studio was a favorite place with all her friends. Something was always going on there; there was always some fresh canvas on the easel, with some tantalizing and bold experiment in progress, — the palette well smeared, the brushes laid out, and Denise in a blouse and dark blue serge skirt, and huge apron faintly colored, like the faded frescoes one sees on the crumbling façade of the old Tedeschi at Venice, a blue velvet cap on her golden hair. Why ask her for masterpieces? It was enough to have contributed this studio to society. She was always ready to drop her work and get out the chafing dish and make a welsh rabbit, or stew oysters or mushrooms — at

least offer a cup of chocolate or tea. Yes, it was a most diverting place.

To-day Ayliffe for once found Denise alone, hard at work.

"I was waiting for you impatiently," she exclaimed. "I was fixing this impression in black and white. Tell me what you think of it." She turned the easel-mounted picture more towards the light.

It was a man's head, dark, handsome, but ironic in expression. Ayliffe looked at it puzzled.

"Is it any one I have ever seen?" she asked.

Denise uttered an exclamation, took the board from the easel, and turned its face to the wall.

"Do you know this?" she asked, putting another head on the easel, with the face surmounted by a fool's cap.

"Major Coulson," said Ayliffe. "But surely, Denise, that is a little unkind. Do not let him see it — it would hurt his feelings."

"Geoff's feelings! He sat for it, cap and all, and was charmed with it — suggested that while I was about it I might have given him the bells also."

"Always faithful, always loyal."

"Too faithful, too loyal. You remember the man with a familiar spirit, a tiresome little being who was always popping up and saying 'I am here!' Before I came out I thought I had only to enter society to find some Prince Charming, brilliant, fascinating, delightful, waiting for me. The unique and only prince watching and waiting turned out to be Geoffrey Coulson, my partner at dancing class. Wherever I have gone since Geoffrey has turned up, and when I am finally led sacrificially to the altar by Uncle Thomas I expect to find Geoff there."

"You might find somebody far less worthy."

"Of course I might; but there might at least be unplumbed depths in some worse man. I like an unexpected quality in people." She replaced Major Coulson's picture by another. "How does that strike you?"

Ayliffe drew a quiet breath and forgot to speak. Her color came and went. Denise laughed.

"You recognize that, I see. Is it a good likeness?" she asked.

"It seems to me just a little effeminate."

"But then Valentine Synnott is effeminate."

"Did he sit for this?"

"I supposed he had told you. They want his picture in one of the magazines, and his photographs so malign his good looks he asked me to make a sketch for an etching."

Ayliffe, like other women, knew how at need to set a smile at play, and she smiled now as Denise drew up a low table and threw on it a portfolio full of photographs hastily mounted for use. If the subject was monotonous it had at least been variously treated. Here was Synnott in every sort of pose: sitting in a corner chair as if for the "Portrait of a Gentleman;" as a journalist reading a paper; as a critic taking notes; entering in his hat and surtout; departing hat in hand; sitting at a table, leaning forward while he stirred a cup of tea and seemed about to speak; again, reclining, lost in reverie. Each view was in its way suggestive, although artificial to theatricality, and one or two were so bad as to be caricatures. Still, there was not a single view of the familiar form and features that did not

speak to Ayliffe's perceptions with more or less eloquence.

"Did you take them?" she inquired.

"With my little kodak I took them," replied Denise.

Ayliffe was conscious that she had flushed, that the smile had stiffened on her face. She had a sense of eclipse, of isolation. It meant a good deal to her that Synnott had been coming to this studio day after day, that he and Denise had thus been working together, and that she herself had never heard of it.

"Dangerous flattery," she exclaimed, seeming to glance from the photographs to the canvas and back again. "You have made a handsome man out of one who is merely fine-looking."

"Surely you know that Valentine Synnott is handsome," said Denise. "He is so handsome that I sometimes hate him. Indeed, handsome is not quite the word, for at times he is beautiful. Vandyke could have painted him. There is just that distinction of features which a photograph ruins."

"I see now that you have given a

Vandyke touch to the eyelids and eyebrows."

"He has it. What I wanted was his vivid look, the look he might wear if he were ever completely interested and forgot himself — not that which he assumes when entering a room, pleased with himself and certain that all the world is equally well pleased."

"Mr. Synnott is not too well pleased with himself," said Ayliffe, combating this tone of disparagement.

"Oh, he is discontented. Nothing he has is quite good enough for him. I admit all that."

"He likes the best. He hates what is mediocre, pretentious, and only half true."

"Do not get excited, dear, good, transparent child."

"I am not excited," cried Ayliffe, all aflame.

"You delightful crystalline brook, I can see every pebble at the bottom of you."

"You do not understand me at all. I do not even understand myself." She broke off, for Denise's subtle, keen face suggested mischief.

“When a girl says she does not understand herself,” Denise now remarked, “everybody else understands her. You must have perceived that all the men draw back to give somebody else a chance to approach you, that whenever you go out to dinner one particular person is invariably assigned to you. My dear, you are ticketed, put on the shelf.”

“Do you mean — do you mean” — panted Ayliffe.

“Do I mean that everybody says you like Val Synnott?” She stopped tantalizingly — met Ayliffe’s eager gaze and went on. “No ; what I mean is that everybody thinks Val Synnott is almost too lucky to have a chance of winning a girl like yourself, who has, besides money, just the beauty and charm which can fix him.”

She paused again. Tears had rushed to Ayliffe’s eyes and now brimmed over. She could not think acutely. She felt as if she had had a blow.

“It is the more of a conquest for you,” Denise proceeded, “because marriage, simply as marriage, does not tempt Val at all. He says a married man in society always

reminds him of a bird with a broken wing."

Ayliffe, who had dropped her lashes over her eyes, now threw back her head a little and looked at Denise through the half-closed lids.

"If I did not know," she said, quietly, "that what you say is three parts mischief and the other part curiosity to see how I take it, I might be angry."

"Angry at what?"

"You tell me that I have advertised my feelings, showed all the world that I care for Mr. Synnott."

"Everybody considers you adorable, everybody" —

"You talk of everybody. Why should not somebody remark upon his spending half his time here sitting to you?"

"Now we have struck the rock of jealousy. Do not for one moment imagine that anything indecorous goes on in this studio. If you look across to that window you will see that Mrs. Maddox has her easel there, and paints her birds and flowers while she chaperons me."

Denise rose as she spoke, put by the

crayon sketch and the photographs, and replaced on the easel the picture at which she had been at work when Ayliffe came in.

"This is the man who interests me," she now said.

This is the door to which I find no key;
This is the veil through which I cannot see.

You know him better. Tell me what he is like."

Ayliffe uttered an exclamation.

"I see it now — Mr. Gale; but you have given him a sort of dramatic intensity that I am not used to."

"Ayliffe Grant, how odd that you have never spoken of that man to me!"

"I must have alluded to him."

"Alluded to him! I suppose I had a shadowy idea that you had a guardian, trustee, or something who paid over your dividends, but why when you entertain is he not invited to your house? Why have you never brought him to see me, — me who am so tired of the men I meet, of the stereotyped tone of the coterie, with its dreary jokes that have to pass muster?"

Ayliffe gazed at her wonderingly.

"You have kept him all to yourself," said Denise. "But tell me about him."

"There is nothing to tell," returned Ayliffe. "When my father and Mr. Birckhead were the firm, Richard Gale applied for a place. He was ready to do anything useful. They gave him a trial and soon found that he was worth keeping. After my father went west Mr. Gale became junior partner. The first time I ever saw him was at the time of my father's death, when he came to Colorado to arrange affairs and bring us back to New York."

"That was the beginning."

"That was the beginning, middle, and end. The first word was the last. I was but a child to be tutored, corrected, laughed at, and I am so still. He has hardly ever praised me, and I am as much afraid of his least reprimand as I was at fourteen."

Denise listened a minute, pondering her words, then returned, —

"I told him last night that I had heard his name before, that it was associated in my mind with money, that I had never been quite certain whether he was a man or a bank."

“Oh, Denise !”

“He smiled grimly, and said that Ayliffe at least had no doubt on the subject. ‘Of your being merely a bank?’ I inquired. ‘Just simply that,’ he answered.”

“Oh, Denise, I can hardly forgive you ! Of course, to you it was just wit and drollery, but it seems to put me in the wrong with Mr. Gale.”

“Naturally I intended to put you in the wrong with Mr. Gale, or with somebody. The fact is, Ayliffe, you have too much money, too many friends, too many lovers, too much of everything in this world. You get your own share of things and mine too. I told Mr. Gale so.”

“It must have amused him. He has his fair share of humor. He knows, better than other people, just how rich or poor I am ; and as to friends and lovers ” —

“Concerning your friends and lovers he has no little curiosity. He asked questions about both Geoff and Val. I said it pained me to discover with how little confidence Ayliffe treated her guardian. He said that the fault lay in himself, that something in him repelled confidence. ‘On the contrary,’

I declared, 'I simply long to confide everything to you.' 'Tell me one thing,' he said; 'is Synnott always as attentive to Ayliffe as he is to-night?' Put upon my mettle in this way, I naturally made out a case."

"What sort of a case?"

"An interesting case. He said Mr. Synnott was a handsome man. I replied that some people thought so. 'A successful littérateur? Makes a good income?' 'Mr. Synnott's quarrel with the universe is that he has not ten thousand a year without working for it,' I replied. 'He is no doubt the sort of man calculated to make a woman happy?' he continued. 'Or miserable,' I replied; 'that is what most of us seem to pine for.' He looked so greatly startled and anxious at this that I added I should be ready to predict in this particular case all would go well if there were plenty of money. 'Plenty of whose money?' Mr. Gale asked next. 'Oh, Ayliffe's,' I answered. 'Mr. Synnott wants freedom, leisure, that he may have a chance to give the world his *magnum opus*.' Mr. Gale seemed to be excessively amused."

Denise had invested the dialogue with no

little spirit, and now stopped and looked at Ayliffe, who sat with her hands in her lap, staring straight before her. She was dressed in dark cloth trimmed with darker fur, and the setting gave her face a clear-cut look sharpened by her loss of color.

"Surely you are not angry with me," cried Denise, in a rage herself. "Surely you're not angry?"

"Yes," said Ayliffe, "I am rather angry."

"With me, with Val Synnott, or with Mr. Gale?"

"With all the world."

"Well, if you are so lucky as to be in love, and if somebody is in love with you, what matters the world?"

"It is horrible, horrible, horrible to be so talked over."

"You remember what the pheasants said when they were asked whether they would prefer to be dished up with bread sauce or wine sauce? They said they preferred not to be dished up at all, but all the same, poor things, they could not appoint their destiny; they were dished up finally, and with bread sauce — wine was too expensive."

AYLIFFE IS CHAPERONED

MISS POLLY sometimes made remarks which seemed to have floated up from some cool depth of wisdom hitherto unsounded by her family. What she happened to say that night at dinner, for example, sounded to Ayliffe full of significance.

"I suppose that when at eight o'clock one feels that unless a certain thing happens instantly life is not worth living, and when at eight-thirty one finds that it has not happened and will not happen, and yet that one is quite as well off, one may as well dismiss the idea that that particular thing is essential to one. Of course fate is fate."

"Yes," Ayliffe returned, "one may be strong as steel or weak as straw, and fate is fate all the same." She was conscious that, while the talk in the studio in the morning had depressed, it had still had the effect of

bracing her. By dinner time she had experienced a rebound. After being so silent at luncheon that the aunts looked at each other in dismay, she talked so much at dinner that the aunts looked at each other again, regarding these variations of mood as full of significance. Spring had been in the air that day, she said. The streets were full of the odor of violets. When the men began to sell pots of growing flowers at the corners, she always began to be homesick for Belport. "One may be so constituted that one is always hoping, when one comes to New York for the season, that high concentration will prove to be high opportunity, and that one is at last to have some touch of greatness in one's experience. Sometimes just for three minutes," the young lady went on, "one believes that the touch of greatness has come. But three minutes soon pass. Then one goes on without it. I have made up my mind that nothing is so charming as just being here quietly with you all."

It was then that Polly uttered her aphorism, which sounded Ayliffe through and made her feel fate had *not* spoken to her,

since at this moment all she recollected of Denise's talk was a sense of wounded vanity.

"I break down without you," she went on. "I make dreadful blunders, commit utter stupidities. Don't ask me to account for them. There are little things that make one long to turn hermit."

Next to being a hermit was the sweet security of being well chaperoned. She reiterated her statement that henceforth she wished always to be guarded by at least two of the aunts, and when after dinner they had gone upstairs to the drawing-room and Kenny Jocelyn was ushered in, all four ladies sat in state in a semicircle to protect their niece. Not that the idea of Kenny suggested any danger, although that young man did happen to represent the world, the flesh, and the devil more than any one else in their acquaintance. What somewhat neutralized his commissions and also omissions was the fact that he was cousin to Thomas Campbell and to Denise Alden, that his mother owned a place in Belpport, so that he had, so to speak, grown up with Ayliffe. His father had been a great railroad man,

who had married so late that he died long before he had a chance to bring up his son wisely. Kenny had been spoiled by his mother, who believed that his inability to keep in the commonplace groove meant a great deal of talent. She had always wished that he should marry Ayliffe Grant, and even Kenny felt that marrying a girl of that figure, those eyes, and that smile, which seemed a part of her speech, would be a triumphant repartee to some of his relatives, who disbelieved in his capacity to cope successfully with life. He had looked in to-night in order that his mother might weigh it in the balance against certain of his misdeeds. She might be rueful, still she was sure these misdeeds were the outcome of Kenny's heroic impulse to do something out of the common, which, like sparks here, there, and everywhere, made him at times a dangerous combustible and explosively scattered all his good resolutions to the winds.

Ayliffe had sat down to her embroidery beside a shaded lamp, which gave her face a subdued glow and threw its light over her pretty taper fingers, also over the fea-

tures of Kenny himself as he bent forward, watching their movements. At such moments and in such society Kenny washed his hands of all his misdemeanors. This home-like charm was all he needed or cared for. He had a sensation of having come across something fresh, piquant, delicious; if only the four old ladies would go away, "like a cloud of witnesses encompassing us around," as he expressed it to his mother afterwards.

Nevertheless, his chatter was of general and not of particular interest. He had promised his mother to spend six weeks with her in Belport in the early summer. With his four-in-hand and his yacht he thought he might be able to endure the quiet. Butler Coulson with his four-in-hand was to be only twenty miles away, and there would be meetings, picnics, in fact all sorts of delightful goings on.

"Mother says she feels it her duty to invite my cousins Ruth and Faith," Kenny proceeded. "It will be the time of their lives, for they have been brought up to take their diversions seriously. It will be a pleasure to enlarge their experience. There

never can be too many girls; don't you think so, Miss Ayliffe? I love to see the top of my coach ablaze with them. For I'm not one of those who consider a coach the best place for making love. Don't tell me you agree with them, Miss Ayliffe. I tell you, for real ease and pleasantness there's nothing like a yacht, — I've held many a girl's hand under her mackintosh just to steady her when she was pale as death with fright."

"Or seasickness," suggested Ayliffe.

"Sure to remember me with gratitude in any case. But give me the girl who does n't turn pale. Now you, Miss Ayliffe — I've seen you with stinging salt spray on your face, your cheeks pink as roses, and your eyes bright as diamonds. Yes, no doubt about it, rough weather gives the best chance of all. It's a test of a woman's beauty, though. She may blush up to rosy red, but when she turns green and purple in the breeze, beauty half veiled is best. Of course as a matter of looks coaching is better. But a shower may come up, and where are you then? I've seen faces with the color all washed off — or on, perhaps —

in streaks from their sunshades. I love a natty yachting rig best. It warms my heart still to remember how you looked in yours last year, Miss Ayliffe."

"It is always Denise who has the prettiest outing suits," said Ayliffe.

"Too well made," said Kenny. "I'd as soon put my arm round a man as round a tailor-fitted girl. It's the feminine touch that bowls me over. I've had tailors myself, and they are no mystery, but what one likes in a girl is a suggestion of mystery; don't you think so, Synnott?"

Ayliffe looked up, startled. There was Valentine Synnott making the round of the aunts before approaching her. It might be observed that she lost color as he came up to her and took her hand.

"Talking of feminine mysteries, are you, Jocelyn?" said the newcomer. "I had supposed that the whole fair sex was as clear to you as light."

"You may well believe that as a rule, Synnott," replied Kenny. "Not a caprice, not a caper, not a wriggle, but what I understand. A fellow like me may seem to have his disadvantages. I can't talk nor look

like you, but I have my compensations, — no woman on earth is afraid of me.”

“I could n’t think of a man of your income having any disadvantages,” said Synnott, sitting down on the other side of Ayliffe.

“Lucky for me I’ve got some income,” said Kenny, with instant intuition of what was in the other’s mind. “Well, it is time for me to move on. If I stay I can’t spoil Synnott’s peace of mind as I should like to, but I might spoil the conversation, or else dance like a fellow on the tight rope to keep clear of subjects I could n’t talk about. You can’t think how I envy anybody who has a whole library of reference behind his simplest sentence, and does n’t have to draw on his imagination or experience for every blessed word he utters, as I do. I’ve got a library myself. I look at it mournfully sometimes and wonder just where I ought to begin. I suppose you are thinking I ought to know more about leaving off. You don’t go to balls, Miss Ayliffe, so I shan’t see you at the Coulson-Jones’. I shan’t see anybody I should so like to dance with. I’m getting too venerable for

that sort of thing myself. All the *débütantes* treat me like an old foggy and order me to dance with them. I *am* an old foggy. I like to spend an evening like this, — nothing to be sorry about in the morning. It pleases my mother, too,” the ingenuous fellow added to Miss Honor, with the air of one who seeks to be in favor with guardians and chaperons. “She says that I need just such influences as these. I only wish anybody here liked me as well as I like all of you.”

“We like you well enough to wish to hear good news of you, Kenny,” retorted Miss Honor, grimly.

“I hope I did not send Jocelyn away,” observed Synnott, when the young man had finally taken himself off. “I cannot be a quarter as amusing. What he said about the difference between men who talked out of books instead of out of experience struck home to me.”

Ayliffe seemed to assent, and Synnott went on making out the unquestioned superiority of a young fellow like Kenny, who, without dividing his powers, or having to look before or after and decide what

would pay and what he could not afford, like a youthful god gave all his brain, faculty, muscle, nerve to his yachting, coaching, polo, cricket, golf, and what not, — not only all his normal force, but all the artificial strength to be imparted by incessant stimulants in season and out of season. No wonder that his talk was so interesting, no wonder that with all these expensive amusements to describe he was the agreeable fellow all the world found him.

“He is certainly very amusing sometimes,” Ayliffe conceded; “even his mistakes are often ingenious.”

It could hardly have been jealousy of Kenny that plucked at Synnott’s heart and spoiled his temper. He had nothing to tell to Kenny Jocelyn’s discredit, but since the four aunts sat watching him, each in her way as paralyzing as Medusa, he had presently another sarcastic fling at Kenny.

“What strikes me,” said Miss Honor, “is the utter vacuity of his talk to Ayliffe. The dear girl is patient, but it would wear me out.”

“Not but that we like the young man in his way,” put in Mrs. Ritter, conservatively.

"We have seen him grow up in Belpport," remarked Mrs. Cameron, "and one has a feeling about one's neighbors in the country."

"And he is generous," Polly broke in. "He flings his money about in Belpport."

"Very generous," Ayliffe murmured, pensively.

"Jocelyn is just what I admire particularly," said Synnott. "Good muscle, good appetite, and the pride of life are what a sensible man should aim at, and avoid mutations of thought and feeling which leave him nervous and dyspeptic."

He went on pursuing this train, and did not at first observe that he seemed to have lost the ears of his audience. The aunts had grown restless; even Ayliffe was smiling. Synnott, looking down, discovered the cause. Fido had entered the room and had stood winking and blinking, his tail curled down. Not finding himself on the instant the central figure, he had approached the visitor and, sitting down before him on his hind legs, now waved his forepaws in the air, yawning at the same time.

"Good heavens!" said Synnott, accepting

one of the outstretched paws and shaking it. "I hope there is nothing personal in this demonstration. Are you begging me to go away, Fido?"

"Oh, dear, no," said Mrs. Ritter. "Fido is never rude."

"Probably either Colette or Colotte has gone to sleep on his bed," suggested Miss Honor.⁴

"It is more than likely they have both taken possession of it," said Mrs. Ritter. "They are quite capable of it."

"Cats are so lacking in honor and generosity," said Miss Polly. "They take every sort of mean advantage of Fido, who is magnanimity itself."

"Magnanimity!" repeated Mrs. Ritter, in heat, "when I have known him eat a whole plate of fish, Mr. Synnott, which ordinarily he abhors and cannot be induced to touch, simply to prevent the cats having it."

"Actually gobbled it up in the most indecent haste," said Miss Honor.

"He was out of temper for the moment," explained Mrs. Cameron. "Actually, Mr. Synnott, Fido has a delicate conscience and

the keenest sense of honor. Let me give an instance, Mr. Synnott. When Fido was a puppy he loved to run down chickens. The dear little fellow had no idea of doing harm, but he actually killed half a dozen. Well, Mr. Synnott, I took him to one poor little dead chicken I had found; first I whipped him gently, then talked to him, and afterward I whipped him again, telling him how wicked it all was. I kept this up for a time, Mr. Synnott. Will you believe me when I say that from that day to this Fido has not only never run after a chicken, but will make a considerable circuit to avoid meeting one? You perceive, Mr. Synnott, I had got hold of his conscience."

"You can't get hold of a cat's feelings in that way," said Miss Polly. "I have altogether given up keeping birds. Colette and Colotte are both remorseless."

"But is it not what one so admires about a cat," argued Mrs. Ritter, "that, however civilized they may seem, they remain just themselves? Dogs adopt human faults. They suffer from ennui, they cannot amuse themselves. There is an infinite variety of resource about a cat."

Ayliffe had thrown back her head against the cushions of her chair and was laughing. The aunts, tired of sitting up and looking wiser than they felt, having embarked on their favorite subject, would not let it go. Appealing to Mr. Synnott at every turn, each brought forth fresh instances of affection and sagacity. Dogs and cats long buried in their graves were trotted forth, their qualities rediscovered. Synnott had come to the house to-night in an arbitrary mood and with a distinct purpose. For months he had found an extreme charm in Ayliffe. The girl interested him for what he understood in her, and for what he did not understand. She seemed perfectly frank and open about herself, and with her aunts she was so docile that she was like a school-girl. At this moment, looking at her, he was captivated afresh, as she sat, her head thrown back, her eyes half closed, showing a glimmer of fun through their lids, while between her parted lips gleamed her small, white, even teeth.

“See!” cried Miss Honor. “He knows his friend!”

For Fido — finding Mr. Synnott of no

avail — was now whining and running forward and back impatiently, his little red tongue hanging out, as he pulled at Ayliffe's gown.

"He wants something of me," said Ayliffe.

"No, no, dear," cried Miss Honor. "If you will excuse me a second, Mr. Synnott, I will go."

"And I too," said Mrs. Cameron. "I will only be one minute, Ayliffe."

"I really must take a peep to see if the cats are in possession of the cushion," murmured Polly, and off she went, and Mrs. Ritter, with unexpressed but jealous fears for Colette and Colotte, followed.

"At last," said Synnott. He drew his chair closer, leaned forward and looked up into her face. "I came here to-night to see *you*," he went on in his low, clear voice; "but Jocelyn was here before me."

"Poor Kenny — well, why not?" said Ayliffe.

"Exactly — why not? Since you are surrounded by just that magical atmosphere which makes a man happy, contented, why should you not be sought! But I am in a

jealous mood. Not but what there is a sort of charm in your very elusiveness. This background of aunts, dogs, and cats " —

He was interrupted.

"Do forgive me," said Mrs. Ritter. "I surely must have dropped my other glasses. I cannot see in these at all. I am so sorry! Don't rise, Mr. Synnott. How tiresome — how stupid of me! I beg of you to sit down, Mr. Synnott. Go right on talking. Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you. So good of you! Thank you so much!"

Synnott watched Mrs. Ritter flutter out the door, then sat down again.

"I never understand why it is," he now observed, "that a man is at one time so much more the slave of his imagination than at other times. Deep in every man's heart and brain, of course, is his ideal of the happiness some woman can give him. A man is always more or less curious about love, realizing the fact that some woman is likely to make a difference with his life. He begins early, and if he does not commit himself at once, he is likely to find, before he is thirty, some half dozen charming creatures who, on one side or another of his

being, seem to promise what he demands. So long as he is not in love" —

"Oh, Ayliffe," cried Miss Polly, bustling into the room, "if you and Mr. Synnott could have seen Colette and Colotte on Fido's cushion! Whether it was reality or all pretense, there they were, sleeping so comfortably, with soft quiverings and purrings, and opening and shutting their paws, it seemed cruelty to dispossess them."

Having darted in, Miss Polly once more darted out. So far Ayliffe had sat as if still hypnotized by Denise's words. Now her first embarrassment had passed. She had a mischievous sense that Synnott's intensity of look and tone, his expression of pleasure in being left alone with her, were just so many droppings of the plummet, — as if his desire was to reach some hitherto unexplored depths. At each reappearance of one of the aunts he did not disguise his disappointment. Ayliffe, having no wish to be sounded, seized the first subject that presented itself.

"I love Fido, but I admire the cats, — they are so delicate. The other day I put three jonquils in a tall, fragile crystal vase on my

dressing-table, and Colette, coming in and looking round for some novelty, jumped up and began to play with them, when, to her surprise, she saw another cat in the glass going through the same performance. 'Evidently a rival,' she thought to herself, and put more coquetry and spirit into her play, and the cat in the glass also growing lively, the jonquils were well tossed about. Still she did not hurt them, nor did the play endanger the vase. Would it not have made a charming picture?"

"Tell one of Denise Alden's artist friends to paint it," said Synnott. "I should care more for a picture of you at this moment, a new *Giaconda*. A man requires to see you just as you are here to-night, in this environment of aunts and cats and dogs, to appreciate your real beauty. Say that a man loved you, wanted you for his wife, it would give him pause to think of the danger he ran of making you less happy. Why should a girl guarded, surrounded, worshiped, whom everybody wants to save from a moment's pain, be asked to save *me*, for example? A man in love is such a horrible egoist!"

Ayliffe heard him to the end, her glance meeting his, her head a little on one side, as if weighing his meaning. Then, as if to take another minute to turn his words over in her mind, she leaned back, shifting her position, and, as if seized by a new idea, exclaimed, —

“I saw twenty pictures of you at Denise’s studio to-day. I wonder which one of them was the egoist.”

“Do you mean which one suggested the man in love? Not one, I assure you. When I am with Miss Alden it is quite another side of me from what you see.”

“But there were so many pictures, and they were all so different,” Ayliffe persisted. “If there are more, Mr. Synnott, than I saw in her portfolio, you must be a very many-sided man indeed. And I always feel, too, as if Denise could bring out all the possibilities that are in each and all of us. And you, in particular, seem to belong so much more to that broader life of hers than to” —

She did not finish her sentence, but, after waiting an instant, he caught up her meaning.

“Oh, I’m in that sort of life — I have to be!” he exclaimed. “I’m in it by my necessities! I’m in it by my liking to be in touch with novelty, with new ideas. I’m in it by our being kindred artists in a way, by the need of sympathy. I’m steeped in its affectations, too, — I’m bound by its limitations. I’m in it by my envy and jealousy of the real clever men of the world, by my knowledge of a higher intellectual atmosphere. If a man is dominated by his art he may isolate himself as he will — he is never alone. But the rest of us — poor devils without originality, without real inspiration — need the clack of the coterie, the quotations of the market, the stimulus of the story of the big price paid, the howl over the latest failure or the newest success. It is what I hate, — what I long to be far from; still” —

He spoke as if stung into speech, — as if his wish was to leave nothing unsaid, to create between them the clearest possible understanding. At this moment he knew what he wanted. But at this very instant a little white face appeared at the door; it was followed by a second. There was a waving,

as of victorious pennons — a pause, a reconnaissance, a dash, an onslaught — and Collette and Colotte had descended upon the two like a whirlwind! Synnott could hardly have told whether there were two cats or fifty. The room seemed full of them.

They were followed by the aunts, who, each reproaching the other for disregarding the spirit and essence of Ayliffe's command and deserting the post, now hurried back prepared to explain, to give further details.

Synnott accordingly took his leave. It had all been a fiasco — one of many fiascos; but there was some comfort in the thought that he was still free, that he had not committed himself irretrievably.

VI

AYLIFFE FACES FACTS

IF Ayliffe had a rather magnificent habit of defining her likings and dislikings to herself, she was only answering the requirement of those about her who believed that in her all the conditions of distinction and happiness met. Other girls might have to eke out and patch their destinies with odds and ends of contrivance — not Ayliffe. But it had come home to her after that talk with Denise that she had had to swallow the humiliation of being accused of showing her heart before the man had proclaimed his; that she had been patted on the head for her magnanimity in leaving a suitor in no uncertainty.

Denise's insolence, witting or unwitting, had put everything concerning her acquaintance with Synnott in a new light, had made him seem remote, almost strange. If Ayliffe had an ideal of a possible lover it was of a

man who feels more than he says and looks. Synnott's high melancholy reserve had made an immense impression. The flashing up and dying down of feeling, the hesitation, the doubt — these had been what her imagination lived by. Sometimes for weeks their intimacy had seemed perfect ; she had had the feeling that he offered her the very foretaste of his every idea and wish. If he went away, if he dropped out, as it were, all the time he was gone she had seemed to wait for something ; but he had always come back, and to have him come back was a triumph.

What she felt most in this present humiliation was that Denise had told all this to Mr. Gale, explaining that Valentine Synnott's apparent fluctuations of feeling, the wind of his favor blowing hot or cold as the fit seized him, simply meant that he found it necessary to marry an heiress. Ayliffe could hardly have told what emotion of her own was beneath this tension. She endured it for a week. Then the mists and doubts fled away. She decided to go and see Richard Gale. At any rate, temerity was a better fault than cowardice. She wanted once more to feel her old splendid security,

— to know on what ground she stood. This quick spring in her blood toward action was a relief.

It was a March morning when she entered the outside office and sent in her card to Mr. Gale. She had not long to wait, but presently was ushered into his private room, where in five minutes he joined her. She rose hurriedly, apologetically.

“Well, Ayliffe,” he said, “anything wrong?”

“No,” replied Ayliffe, conscious that her heart was hammering in her ears and that the blood had rushed to her face. “Can you spare me half an hour?”

“Half an hour?” he repeated, as if aghast.

“Are you so busy?”

“Busy? Of course I am busy. Do you suppose I have nothing to do? But all the same, when you come to see me I have eyes, ears, and brain only for you. I have not often a client who brings the aroma of violets.”

Ayliffe took out the bunch of violets pinned inside her coat and gave it to him. He took her hand along with it.

"Why, you are trembling!" he exclaimed. He drew her near to him and looked down into her face. Her manner was eager and childish, but the expression of her eyes startled him.

"What is it?" he demanded. "I am cudgeling my brains to think what sort of an errand gives you that face."

He had one of her hands in each of his, and was regarding her steadily. "Oh, I begin to understand," he added, in a different voice. "You have come to tell me that you are engaged."

She laughed. "No, indeed. I have come on a much less romantic errand. Indeed, it is rather sordid."

"Marriage sometimes entails sordid considerations," said Gale. He had dropped her hands. There was a sort of roughness in his voice, and his lips and chin showed an effort at self-control. It was clear something had disturbed him. "Out with it!" he said, peremptorily.

"Don't begin by being angry with me," she said humbly.

"Angry! Have you done anything to make me angry?"

"I hope not," said Ayliffe. "But when I—feel a little timid and in doubt, I am always a little afraid of you, Mr. Gale, but now—shake hands with me, will you not?"

He shook hands with her, set a chair, and as if with professional tact let her face the light, while he took his place with his back to the window.

"There is something I have long wished to understand," she began at once.

"And now you have bearded the lion in his den. No wonder you quake and tremble."

"Don't be ironical—don't be harsh. Think for a minute of just how I am situated," she proceeded, her voice, indeed her whole manner, full of deprecation. "I have grown up with the idea that I have a good deal of money. I seem able to do whatever seems pleasant to me; yet neither Mr. Birckhead nor you ever said to me that I was worth so many thousands of dollars, or gave the exact figures of my income."

Deep in the shadow although his features were, she could see that every muscle of his thin face quivered.

"It seems to me," she said, with more self-command, "that I am old enough and

even clever enough to be trusted with some knowledge about my money and the way it is invested. We sometimes joke about dividends, but yet I have no clear idea of what I have a right to spend."

"You would like to have a larger allowance," he now suggested. "You feel as if perhaps" —

"No, I have no reason but a woman's reason," said Ayliffe, able at last to infuse her usual lightness and archness into her manner. "Whatever I have is enough — it must be enough. What I hate is to be left so wholly in the dark. Of course it has all come about naturally. You and Mr. Birckhead would not have liked to force details upon mamma in her state of health, and after she was gone I was so young it never occurred to me to make inquiries; but now" —

"Now," said Gale, with a peculiar intonation, "now the day of reckoning has come."

"Please consider me a reasonable being, Mr. Gale!" she exclaimed.

He made a slight grimace.

"Too reasonable, too reasonable entirely,

just like Eve in the garden of Eden. She was a strictly logical person, and liked to know the how and why of things, as if she had been graduated at a woman's college."

"Call it a woman's curiosity," persisted Ayliffe, "but, being a woman, I must needs be curious. I want to know just what my securities are; I should like to look at and hold them in my hand — get the idea of them into my head."

She had begged him not to be displeased, but it was clear that, whether displeased or not, he was terribly embarrassed. His whole face worked — he had flushed deeply. Conjectures flashed through her mind, veining its doubts with light but not illumining. She understood nothing but dreaded everything. Rationally or irrationally, she saw herself beggared. Yet her belief in Gale did not give way even before her prophetic terrors. She forced herself to smile, to speak with more gentleness, to dismiss any suspicion or prejudice.

"I used to take it for granted that we were rich. Mamma used to speak of the relief papa had in feeling that we were well provided for. Then the aunts have a way

of telling everybody I am
woman of the family, and the
extravagances are mine."

Gale sprang up, as if longing for
ment, and began to pace to and fro.

"Surely," said Ayliffe, "I can be asking
nothing out of the usual. Many women take
their property into their own hands when
they are twenty-one."

"And you are twenty-four." He turned
his dark, perplexed face towards her with a
whimsical smile.

"You suggested," she went on, with a
forlorn courage which, even in the midst of
wishing the truth, dreaded and shrank from
it, "that possibly I had come to tell you I
was engaged to be married. I am not en-
gaged — still it might happen" —

"Of course it might happen. Tell me,
Ayliffe, are you going to accept Synnott?"
Gale seemed to snatch at this change of
subject.

"He has not asked me," said Ayliffe,
proudly.

"But if he does?"

"When he asks I am likely to know bet-
ter what I may answer."

GY OF AYLIFFE

with me. Tell me just how
with him." Gale had spoken with
, and now, coming up to her swiftly,
her hand in one of his, and, putting the
finger of his other under her chin, forced
her to look up. "Do you love this man,
Ayliffe?" he demanded.

"Do not ask such a question," she replied.
"Really, I do not know. How can a girl be
sure of such a thing?"

"As that she loves a man she has seen
week after week and month after month,
about whose very marked attentions to her
and her acceptance of them all the world
and his wife are talking!"

He dropped his hold of her hand, turned
his back upon her, and stood looking out of
the window.

"One does not talk about such things,"
she cried with indignation.

"Not to outsiders, I see — I see. Stran-
gers must not intermeddle with Synnott's
joy."

His inquisitive solicitude on such a sub-
ject surprised her, for at this moment, in
the way of love, or in any way, indeed, she
was not thinking of Synnott.

"I suppose," she said, dismissing a subject which seemed to her petty, "that I seem to you very young and foolish. But you might as well give me credit, Mr. Gale, for something besides mere foolish sentiment, some feeling of the heavier responsibilities of life. You know just as well as I do that three quarters of what I spend goes to the house here and at Belport. Without my money neither place could be supported."

He met her eyes. "Go on," he said. "I see there is a case you wish to put."

Scarlet suffused her face. Her eyes dropped.

"Simply this," she faltered. "In case I were to leave them, would there be enough to" —

"You wish to know if, in case of your marriage, you would have enough for yourself and your aunts. Let me assure you that not one of those ladies has the slightest claim upon you."

"They have every claim," she cried, indignantly. "If my marriage were to make any real change in their circumstances, nothing could induce me to marry at all."

As she looked at him a change in his face

was perceptible to her ; still the nature of the change she did not fathom.

“ You have a high regard for duty,” he observed, dryly. “ Still, I really see no need for such a sacrifice.”

“ It would be no sacrifice. I do not think about it as my duty. I love my aunts very dearly. I could n’t be happy if there were any falling off in their comfort.”

He stared at her as if trying his wits at some riddle.

“ How well off is Synnott ? ” he now inquired. “ Has he anything beyond what he makes with his pen ? ”

“ I should judge not.”

“ Does he make enough to support a wife in comfort, for instance ? ”

She disdained to answer, but he detected a quivering of her sensitive lips.

“ Would he be likely to look to his wife for some addition to his means ? ” he argued.

“ I am certain that he would,” she answered, with decision.

“ He is a man of expensive tastes ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Ambitious, too, socially ? ”

"I think so."

"I tell you what, Ayliffe," Gale said, impatiently; "I should like to have a talk with Valentine Synnott" —

"About my affairs?"

"Exactly. When he offers himself to you, send him straight to me. I should like to make sure he is not after your money altogether."

The torment of the situation roused a fear in her.

"You do not try to understand my side, Mr. Gale," she said, pleadingly. "I have sometimes thought Mr. Synnott overestimated my wealth" —

"I say, send the man to me. I can set him right. I will test his disinterestedness."

"I do not insist that he shall be disinterested. Surely a man may expect his wife to have some means."

"I have the old-fashioned notion that a man should not shirk his obligations. Everybody says Synnott hates hard work."

"He hates uncongenial work," said Ayliffe. She felt as if she were put off, played with, her earnestness derided. Her heart was beating violently. She was alternately

flushed and pale. She once more flung away all thought but of the main object of her visit. "Why do you evade my questions, Mr. Gale?" she said. "It makes me feel as if something were wrong. I know that I am taking up too much of your time. I know that my half hour was up long ago, but if I were to go away now I should go away so unhappy that I could not hide it. I am in a state of panic. It is as if I doubted" —

"Doubted my possessing common honesty?" said Gale. "I must seem to you like an embezzler."

"No, I have absolute faith in you."

"Hold on to that absolute faith through thick and thin. You can hardly believe how I am going to try it. There are very few things absolutely satisfactory, Ayliffe. Since you force me to confess the truth, I have to tell you that your fortune is not one of those absolutely satisfactory things."

"Tell me everything," she murmured. "I can bear it. I am sure that you are good and that you have always meant well."

She forced herself to smile. It said much to Gale for her delicacy and her generosity

that she did smile. Still, he saw in her face that she had taken a mortal hurt at his confession that something was wrong. The two regarded each other steadily.

"I wish," he said, "that you could put down your curiosity, your impatience, and let this subject rest."

"No."

"I am in cruel doubt, Ayliffe. I feel as if you were pushing me to the brink of a precipice."

"You are torturing me. Let me have the exact facts in the case. I can't endure secrets — mystery."

There was something in his whole look and manner that amazed her; it seemed as if what he experienced was the relief at throwing off some burden. She told herself that, no matter what she had to listen to, she must be on her guard against a word of reproach. Very possibly, being a busy man with little knowledge of practical life outside of his profession, he had speculated and lost.

"If there have been secrets and mysteries, you can judge whether they have been of my making," Gale said. He took a seat

at some distance from her. "You remember John Birckhead?"

"Of course I remember him perfectly."

"He was not only a friend of your mother's, but he was very much in love with her. Your father was ahead of him in offering himself, was accepted, and the two were married. But Birckhead never cared for any other woman. From the moment your father died he began to look forward to being her second husband."

"I wonder," murmured Ayliffe, perplexed, "if mamma knew this?"

"I should think he made it clear without doubt," said Gale. "However, she soon became such an invalid that his hopes were again defeated. She died. Birckhead was very fond of you, Ayliffe. It was his intention to provide for you. He had spent freely, but he said he must begin and lay up a large part of his income. Then all at once he died suddenly, of pneumonia. Could he have made a will he would have left you certainly the greater part of all that he had; as it was, it passed to his sister and to his brother's children."

Ayliffe was both touched and thrilled.

She had been fond of this bland, pleasant guardian who had made part of her life for seven years. How much his sudden death had subtracted from her good fortune!

Gale went on with energy, almost with vehemence.

"Mr. Birckhead had been perfectly frank with me all through. In fact, when your mother gave him your father's papers he and I went through them together and had a man in from Wall Street to discuss some of them with us. Mr. Birckhead sent me out to Wyoming, Colorado, and California to look after your father's various interests." He paused.

"Tell me everything, please," said Ayliffe.

"He had invested a good deal in certain mines. Several had paid good dividends for a while. The shares are worth something still. We did not sell; some people still believed in one of the lodes, so we held on."

Their eyes met.

"Does it still pay good dividends?"

"There have been just two dividends since your father's death."

She did not understand, yet she understood enough for it to make her gaze at him in consternation.

"The shares may go up yet and make your fortune," he said, soothingly.

"You have often spoken of dividends," she faltered.

"You have spoken, and I humored you, Ayliffe."

She was aware that the real estate interests had not altogether answered her father's expectations. She wondered what other vain deceit would make wreck of her hopes.

"Go on," she said.

His trepidation at least equaled hers. "Mr. Grant had believed that he was going into land speculation at the right moment. As it turned out, he had been strangely unlucky. The boom shortly became a collapse, for his township had no water supply attainable." He paused, then went on. "We took the best advice, and the advice was to sell for what we could get. We did so."

"For how much?"

He named the sum, a few thousand dollars.

She gazed at him as if stupefied.

"Events have justified us," he explained.
"The whole township has been abandoned."

"My father was so hopeful!" murmured Ayliffe.

"Yes, hopeful. But you must remember it was not a real investment, it was a speculation. He knew the risks he was running."

"What else is there?" she demanded pitifully.

He shook his head. His own self-command was severely tried,—that was clear.

"I do not understand," she murmured, her lips parted in an anguish of uncertainty.

"No, you do not understand. It is a cruel disappointment. But remember, Ayliffe, that I wished to spare you. Mr. Birckhead had just one feeling,—that your mother must go on believing that she was in possession of an ample income. He had the same wish for you. I recall his saying once that above all and everything else your little boat must not be left to founder in the deep sea."

"And all the time," murmured Ayliffe, as in a dream, "we had little or nothing."

"He was your mother's friend and your

father's cousin. If his wishes had come to pass he would have been her husband and your father."

"And he gave us the money we had to live on?"

"Mr. Birckhead made a fair income. His own people were richer than himself. He spent freely until the last, when he was ambitious to put by a hundred thousand or more for you."

"It sounds kind," she burst out, "but I begin to be angry with Mr. Birckhead."

Mr. Gale bent a deep look upon her, but maintained strict silence.

"I see," she said, recklessly, "that you consider me ungrateful, but oh, Mr. Gale, gratitude may be a heavy burden."

"If Mr. Birckhead made a mistake he made it from the sincerest wish for your happiness."

"But don't you see how it comes home to me that I insisted that everything should be lavished upon mamma; that specialist after specialist should come to see her, not only from New York, but from Boston and Philadelphia? Then the skilled nurses, — Aunt Honor and I were there, but that was

not enough. Luxuries, too, without stint, — champagne, fruit out of season, the costliest flowers. She did not care — it was my own idea ; but still Mr. Birckhead seconded me in every whim, — indeed, urged me on.”

“ Of course he urged you on.”

“ Yet all the time it was his money we were spending. I recall how that last winter she was often so cold, shivered in the warmest room. I told Mr. Birckhead that I wanted some soft, downy thing for her, and he and I went shopping for it. We ransacked the whole town. I was bent on its being not merely comfortable, but pretty, and becoming in color and texture. And when finally we came upon what suited me, oh, how it cost ! It was fit for a queen. ‘ Now that is what she ought to have,’ I said, and he answered, ‘ Buy it, and if it cost double the amount we could not begrudge it.’ And how pleased mamma was ! ‘ There is a foolish pleasure in being rich and doing things handsomely,’ she said. Neither she nor I thought of thanking Mr. Birckhead. It was papa’s money he was keeping for us, — it was his simple duty to fill our purse when it was empty.”

A little petulant laugh, akin to tears, rang out as she finished. But no sooner were the words uttered than she grew scarlet and caught herself up as if she had made some damaging admission. Her words had brought up a distinct image of herself not so very long ago holding out an empty purse to Mr. Gale. It set her nerves tingling in a new way. This strange, sudden, wild freak of her imagination made her feel as if her senses were leaving her. She struggled after self-command, tried to repel thoughts, suspicions, inferences. To dismiss one was to start up a whole host ambushing themselves nearer and nearer the citadel of her roused, alarmed consciousness.

"It is not quite clear to me, Mr. Gale," she said, in a low, hurried way. "You say Mr. Birckhead left no will, that his property went to his heirs-at-law, that his intention of providing for me was not carried out. Where has the money come from that I have lived on since his death?"

"My dear Ayliffe, you have bonds and stocks. It is your guardian's business to make money of them."

She was looking at Mr. Gale, her beauti-

ful, questioning eyes fixed on him, as if her life depended on his words. He had not looked at her as he spoke. His half averted face was white, stiff, oddly puckered up. She wanted to ask a question, but somehow the words failed her. The suspicion that had crossed her mind was of course utterly out of reason. It was foolish in her to be so disturbed. She had only to ask a question. A word from him could stop this thumping of her heart. But how to frame the inquiry, how give shape and substance to the horrid phantom, how find voice to utter the galling thing? Yet the fear haunted her, plucked at her reason, gnawed at the core of her. It overcame her. Something seemed to ring through her like a bell. For a few moments she sat as if stunned, conscious only of the vibration of the bell and of a tingling at the end of her fingers. Returning finally to thought and feeling, she found that Mr. Gale was supporting her, that he had bared her hands and was chafing them between his own, looking into her face anxiously. On the instant the multiplying sting of the terror returned.

“Have you given me money since Mr. Birckhead died?” she faltered.

He met her glance one moment, then dropped her hands and, turning, walked to the mantelpiece and stood with his back to her, leaning his head on his hand.

She no longer needed an answer to her question. Her mind no longer struck shallows on the lowest ebb of the tide, but swung to the fierce flood of certainty. Round a hundred incidents, each of which at the time of its occurrence had excited curiosity, clustered plain proof. She could hardly accuse him of having tried to deceive her, for at this moment she could see he had made small effort to hide the fact that she was dependent on himself. He had been candid, blunt, a little tyrannical. He had laughed at her scrupulosities of refinement, had more than once put down her affectations with a high hand. She saw as in a magic mirror her vanities, her conceits. She had more than once attempted, as a woman of the world with position and experience beyond his own, to put him in awe of her standards. It ran through her now with shrewdest irony how he had all the time

been amused by these infantile audacities. This idea of his easy derision was each moment intensified. She felt as if his quiet, keen observation had been turned upon her like a burning-glass, — she was burned, scorched, shriveled under his knowledge of her. No stroke of misfortune could have seemed so bitter, no humiliation so galling as this !

Then, too, why was he silent ? Why could he not in some simple, honest, plain phrase put the facts before her ? In what he would say there lay the test of the man.

“ It is horrible ! ” she cried aloud. “ It is intolerable ! ”

She stretched out her arms straight before her, as if they had been manacled. They fell down helpless, and again a knell seemed to sound through her whole being, and she saw and felt as though in a mist, with no clear sensation.

Mr. Gale had turned at her cry. His face was haggard, his whole aspect sombre. He looked like a man who has resolved to acknowledge or deny nothing imputed to him, yet is coerced to say something.

She seemed to hear him addressing her,

and the struggle for consciousness began again. He was all the time coming closer.

"What is it you are saying?" she asked, faintly.

"Can't I make you feel that what I intended was kind?" He stamped in his perplexity, then went on hoarsely, incoherently: "Good God! Is it incredible to you that I had some feeling for the girl I had watched grow up almost from a child? Can you suppose that it did not appeal to me to see all your father's efforts to secure a competence for his wife and child turned out air-bubbles, — a mere smoke wreath? Then, knowing just what Mr. Birckhead had concealed from you, and how he had intended to make it all right by giving you a little fortune, was I — when he died without time to make a will — to blurt out the whole story?"

"Yes — a thousand times yes!" cried Ayliffe, the blood rushing to her face.

"Well, if I had, what then?" he asked.

"I was younger," she replied, with spirit. "I could have set to work to do something. I am not so dull that" —

"You refuse to see," he said, interrupt-

ing as if he did not know she was speaking, "that Mr. Birckhead and I had all through been one in the matter. When he lay gasping in death I saw a question in his eye. I said to him, 'It shall all be right about Ay-liffe — do not have a moment's trouble.' He pressed my hand."

Gale, pausing, held out the hand that the dead man had pressed, as if imploring her clemency, but her heart was hard towards him. To soften now was to give up the battle utterly.

"You were kind to Mr. Birckhead; to me it was" —

She broke off, either not finding the word to express her meaning or withholding it.

"I see," said Gale, abruptly. "Any feeling on my part toward you is to be considered a presumption, an intrusion, perhaps an impertinence. You are thinking of conventionalities."

"You might consider that they represent something important to me," she said icily.

"What can conventionalities represent to you, that in their behalf you are ready to misinterpret something that was in me absolutely spontaneous, besides being wholly

friendly, wholly human?" He looked into her unresponsive face as he said this, himself infinitely touched; then, when she made no sign, he turned away, taking a few steps only, yet seeming to go to a distance. "You have often told me," he went on, "both by implication and direct word, that I am not in society, that I do not understand just how things are done in society. Be it so. I meet you, then, outside the polite world on the simple ground of our common humanity. When society and its conventions burn up like a scroll, certain things not wholly worthless will yet endure. Let me tell you something that happened in this very office, more than twenty-one years ago. I came here — ragged, I dare say, out at elbows — and asked to see John Birckhead. He came in and looked at me, wondering what waif of the streets I was. Your father followed him and sat just there. I told Mr. Birckhead my name, said that I was his far-away cousin, that I had made up my mind to be a lawyer and wished him to help me through college. His first idea was that it was a good joke. I pulled my school books out of my bag and bade him

examine me. This interested both men. The upshot of it was that they decided between them that they would make the experiment. Your father was even then planning to go west, and soon went. Mr. Birckhead sent me to college; then, when I had taken a degree, gave me a stool here while I attended the law school; and all this time he helped not only me, but my father and younger brother. Can you not see, Ayliffe, that after all these benefits I owed him a debt? I was glad, proud, to do something for him in return. Then besides, my father and brother both died. Can't you see that, alone as I was, it has been no small boon to have some outlet out of this life of prosaic realities, — to know you and to see you and the dear, pretty old ladies, every one of whom I have a regard for? I have never for one instant felt that you owe me any thanks. Rather it is that with heart and soul and mind and strength I feel a debt of gratitude to you, just as I feel a debt of gratitude to the sun that shines and the wind that blows. I have been thankful that " —

Her weary eyes were traveling round the

room. He paused. He saw that she was not listening.

"Do you keep those papers of my father's here?" she inquired. "It would perhaps make it all seem more clear were" —

"Great Heavens!" he exclaimed, as if stung. "You do not suspect me of dishonesty, of falsifying?"

"No," she said, listlessly. "Only I should like to" —

"Everything shall be sent to you. Everything has been kept, of course. There is a whole boxful of papers. Your certificates of stock are not here. They are in one of the vaults of the Trust Company. But you shall have them in your own hands."

Alive to something in his tone which accused her, she looked up, murmuring humbly, "Do not be displeased with me."

"Displeased? My feelings do not count. Suspect me of anything, accuse me of anything, complain, taunt, if it gives you any comfort. You don't know how it costs me that you have this to bear." A thought came to him. "Promise me one thing," he exclaimed, and caught her hand. "Do not tell the old ladies."

"How can I help it?" she asked, troubled.

"Promise me not to tell them for at least six months to come. Trust me so far, Ayliffe."

"Very well," she said, but appeared to wonder. "I don't quite see" —

"No, you do not quite see, but it will come. What has been going on cannot end in a moment. It would bewilder them, alarm them, perhaps do harm. Wait a little. It often seems a relief to act in an emergency, but there is no step backward. You are capable of reason and self-restraint, Ayliffe. I ask you to use both."

"But I can't go on taking" —

"Taking my money?" He supplied the word she shrank from using. "No, you shall not; it shall all be arranged. Your hand on it, Ayliffe! Until I give you leave you will promise me to say nothing of what I have told you to any person alive."

She put her passive hand in his. "It is only postponing the evil day," she murmured. "Still I will confess it is a relief not to carry home such heart-breaking news."

He pressed her hand and released it, and walked away a little distance. "Frankly,"

he said, "I do not see why things might not go on in the same old way, with perhaps a little variation." He paused and looked at her with the flicker of a smile on his grim, set face. "You might, perhaps, become my wife, Ayliffe," he added, in so dry a voice and with so little emphasis that the suggestion struck her as ironical.

"That is the crowning touch of your generosity," she returned, with obvious intention to pay back irony with irony still more bitter. "But I will spare you such a sacrifice."

"It would give me intense happiness."

He took a step nearer. If his declaration had been vague, the way she shrank back from him had been quite sufficiently definite. Still he stood quiet and mute a moment longer before he spoke, as if to let his passive declaration appeal to her.

"I urge nothing but the fact that I love you beyond anything in the world, Ayliffe, — that I would lay down my life for you," he added. "Of course I know you are far above me, but this arrangement would settle things comfortably."

"Most uncomfortably for me."

"You had better turn it over in your mind, Ayliffe. You see it would settle matters all round. Look at it in the light of a painful duty."

"Not until I have exhausted other resources," said Ayliffe, with some determination in her voice.

"I know—I know I am not the only one," retorted Gale. "However, I doubt if anybody—but no matter about that. Think of me as an absolute well-wisher. You may as well trust me."

"Oh, I do," said Ayliffe. The tears rushed to her eyes. Hers was, after all, a sensitive nature, and conflicting feelings rushing together wrought her into the state where impulse passes into action as combustibles into flame. "Oh, forgive me, forgive me, Mr. Gale, for seeming so absolutely ungrateful," she cried, passionately, then caught his hand and kissed it.

He drew it away from her lips as if the touch burned him.

"Good-by," said he. "You had better go now. You have more humility and more pride, Ayliffe Grant, than was ever before vouchsafed to any human being."

VII

NOT A CLEVER WOMAN FOR NOTHING

HUMILITY, yes, but pride — where was it? Ayliffe was ready to ask this as she took her way up town, confused, distracted, made a stranger to herself. As she opened her purse to pay the fare a thousand miserable, petty thoughts swarmed in her mind. Was this weary, disenchanted girl, who blushed at the sight of the money in her hand, the Ayliffe Grant who had believed in herself and had decided to take the world with blitheness and accept all chances? Without extravagance or sordidness, money had yet represented so much to her, — ease, freedom, the spring of energy.

She remembered her mother saying that her one consolation was that she could leave her child in a nest of comfort. This money which now seemed to scorch the girl's fingers had effected so much! It had lifted each one of the aunts from a narrowing life into one full of expansion and pleasantness.

Just as in a garden every flower requires its own constituent elements in order to be perfected, so each one of the aunts needed, in order to be herself and to be happy in herself, certain ingredients of life. It had been Ayliffe's delight to humor each one's tastes and instincts. Each had protested, yet each had accepted with pride, saying to outsiders, "Of course these extravagances are Ayliffe's. She is the rich woman of the family." Ayliffe knew the end of her purse too often to call herself rich, but she could stint herself, even resort to the most meagre-hearted economies, in order to be lavish to her aunts.

Now she could see that her perpetual restlessness for achievement, her keen interest in carrying through some present object, had all this time kept her from looking into her own affairs. A girl of the usual swiftness of apprehension must have gained some sort of inkling of the truth from Mr. Gale's evasions, his infinitesimal doses of fact, each given with that grim smile of his tinged with irony. As the man's face, thin, dark, finely lined, rose before her, she recalled the first time they had met, just after her father's death.

He had been sent by Mr. Birckhead to Los Angeles to bring her and her mother East. They had not expected an escort, and Ayliffe had studied guide-books and had made every arrangement for their journey ; and when this " lawyer's clerk " quietly took the whole matter into his own control, altering even the general route, the tall, slim girl of fourteen had not been afraid to show him all the rebellious petulance and wilfulness of which she was capable. The quiet, shabby young fellow seemed indeed to have a gift of creating emergencies in which he could be of service to Mrs. Grant ; but it was perhaps illogical to credit him with the blockade of snow which would have shut them up for a week between the drifts if they had come by the route Ayliffe had planned. Of course he was right, but Ayliffe had said to herself that she detested people who were always right. He had never intruded ; he had possessed a distinct gift of sitting silent for any length of time without awkwardness or constraint. There was no fussiness, no importance, no self-consciousness in the man, but he was never without effect, and from that day to this Ayliffe had had the flicker of a

sense that if any one knew her utterly and unreservedly to the depths of her nature it was Richard Gale. She said to herself to-day that if she had always hated him a little, she at last understood and justified herself. Now that she knew herself to be, as it were, at his mercy, she realized that she had always been a puppet, dancing to the strings he held. She might have made the admission that he had generally kept out of her way, rarely turning up save when she needed him, especially when she needed more money. But always she had had a restless sense that he was too near her; that, without taking any sort of liberty, he was in some subtle way too familiar; that he had all her secrets in his pocket. At least now she had one alternative, — she could set herself free. How to do it — how in some way could she show him she had escaped?

Luckily she required no depth of discretion in disguising her emotions before her aunts. She found them all sitting in the morning room, marking seed catalogues, wholly taken up with, and carried away by, their own excitements. It would soon be time for removal to their country place at

Belport, and they were already in imagination laying out the garden. At this moment, the question of giving over to roses two oblong beds which had been made ready the autumn before, or diversifying them with poppies and cornflowers, was being discussed with energy. Mrs. Ritter and Mrs. Cameron had a passion for roses; but Polly was experimental, and poppies, particularly the new varieties, did present such opportunities! While they were still engaged on the subject Denise Alden dropped in to lunch with them. Denise knew every path and bed and turn of the old Cameron garden, knew where each flower grew, and had an eye for effects. The subject lasted throughout the meal. Afterwards Miss Honor and Polly were to set forth and buy bulbs and seeds, according to the lists they had made out.

"One may afford to buy all the seeds one wants, surely," said Miss Polly with scorn, as if some one had suggested economy. She looked at Ayliffe as she spoke, and Ayliffe answered, —

"All the seeds we can possibly plant."

Denise's instinct was rarely at fault where Ayliffe was concerned. She found her curi-

osity going out with a rush. Something had happened to the girl, and she must know what it was. Denise's subtlety often created mysteries when Ayliffe was wholly simple and natural, but to-day her penetration was not at fault. As soon as the meal was over and the angoras and Fido were being given their share, Denise exclaimed,

"Can't we go upstairs, Ayliffe? I want to ask you about something."

Once in Ayliffe's room, the two girls looked at each other.

"I see," said Denise, putting a finger on each cheek and then kissing her.

"What do you see?" said Ayliffe, and she herself glanced in the glass. Really, she did not look as if the cold breath of impoverishment had blown across her. Her eyes were dilated and unusually bright, and a vivid spot of pink burned in each cheek.

"What do you see?" she asked.

"Something has happened; you shall tell me what."

"I am like Dogberry," said Ayliffe, with a little laugh. "Although I have two gowns and everything comfortable about me, I have had losses."

"Losses!" repeated Denise. "You look as if you had gained some unexpected treasure."

"I have — of clear knowledge," Ayliffe replied. "I know myself and my past, present, and future much better than I did at breakfast time."

"Are you engaged to be married?"

"No."

"Some man has been making love to you."

"You are too romantic."

Ayliffe experienced a sort of scorn at the suggestion. The fact had hardly reached her consciousness that a man had that morning offered her a love which she had tried and tested for years. It had seemed to her half a joke and half an apology from Mr. Gale for having nothing better to offer.

"I wonder," she went on, "why you are always thinking of my being in love, Denise. You are not in love yourself, at least so far as I know."

"Little you know. I have been in love all my life with somebody. What else is there in a woman's life?"

If Ayliffe had had one moment of weak-

ness in which it might have seemed easy to confide in Denise, it had passed. Somehow the aspect of her room, with its flowers, its little table of silver knickknacks, its pots of flowers on the window sill, the broad lounge piled with cushions, the bookcases with their rows of books, seemed full of efficacy. An hour ago what she longed for had been to vanish out of life. But that was over.

Denise had gone up to the two rows of photographs on the mantelpiece, and seemed to be looking for one in particular.

"I hoped you had a picture of your guardian," she now observed, with an air of disappointment.

"Of Mr. Gale?" said Ayliffe. "Oddly enough, it never occurred to me to ask for his picture."

"He has a fine face, so delicately and clearly cut. I should like to see a photograph of him." Denise sat down by a little table and began to finger the silver knickknacks. "Always a new one when I come," she said. "And the flowers! Why, they are lilies of the valley and white lilacs! From the unknown?"

"From the unknown."

"Have you no idea who it is?"

Ayliffe shook her head. "Those roses are from Kenny Jocelyn," she said, indicating a tall bunch in a crystal vase.

"When Val Synnott gives you flowers, do they come with his name?"

"Sometimes."

"Ayliffe, it is Mr. Gale who sends those anonymous flowers."

The response was swift.

"Mr. Gale would never be so foolish. He is the most matter-of-fact man in the world."

"I am not so sure of his matter-of-factness," said Denise. She paused at this statement, and looked at Ayliffe, who was gazing at her with eagerness. "Ayliffe, you do not see into that man."

"Do you?" questioned Ayliffe.

"Enough to feel that he is one of the most interesting persons I know."

"That is because you like novelty," said Ayliffe. "You are tired of the others."

"Tired? Yes, but because they are deficient in intelligence. He is different from these habitual society men."

"Very different."

A CLEVER WOMAN

"I may not agree with Mr. ^{St. John} ~~St. John~~ on that point of view often vexes me — ^{still} ~~still~~ I trust his insight. Sometimes, when just to hear him talk I lead him on, he convinces me. He could give me a taste for his strong, uncompromising way of looking at things. Now yesterday when we were" —

"Did you see Mr. Gale yesterday?" demanded Ayliffe.

"What — actually jealous?"

"Jealous!" Ayliffe could only stare.

Whether or not Denise felt that she had gone on too quickly, she had halted. Ayliffe had sat down on the extreme edge of the couch without any support, and looked exquisitely uncomfortable. Denise rose and piled the cushions behind her.

"There," she said, "I don't like to see you perching on the verge, as if you expected me to go away on the instant. I want to talk about Mr. Gale. I want you to tell me what there is between you and him."

"Between me and Mr. Gale?" Ayliffe asked.

"Tell me this — has he never made love to you?"

"Never!" replied Ayliffe with energy.

APOLGY OF AYLIFFE

"Is just simply your guardian, — the trustee who hands over your money?"

"Just simply that."

Denise, studying Ayliffe as she spoke, was conscious of a slight resentment in her manner. She took in, too, the idea that Ayliffe was a little bewildered and at a loss.

"Suppose he were to ask you to marry him?" she now demanded. "What then?"

"I should say, 'You do me too much honor.'"

"Do you mean that you would refuse to marry him?"

"I should most certainly refuse," said Ayliffe.

"Yet you like him and believe in him?"

"Absolutely. He is one of the kindest, most generous men who ever lived," said Ayliffe.

"Your relation to him is beautiful," said Denise. "And you are not jealous that he comes to see me now and then?"

"I think it is charming."

"And if he were to fall in love with me?"

Ayliffe clapped her hands. "I should like to see Mr. Gale in love. I should be proud of you, Denise. Honestly, I think

it tremendously flattering if he admires you."

"Oh, I did not say that."

"But unless he admired you very much, unless he really cared, he would not go to see you."

"Do you flatter yourself that all the men who come to see you 'care,' as you call it, even admire you, particularly?"

"That is just where Mr. Gale would be different from the others. Men who are in society have to keep in a certain groove; they are under obligation to pay visits occasionally, and they have to pass the time, like to hear the news and to tell it. But Mr. Gale is never at a loss for something to do to pass the time. He has real occupations, responsibilities, ambitions."

"You will find that Mr. Gale occasionally has a feeling that he would like a little amusement,—a little recreation. He is not old; he needs a little human element in his life. At least he likes to come to me because we can talk."

"What about?"

Denise was conscious of the girl's wide, attentive gaze.

“Everything,” said Denise, with a comprehensive gesture. “You said you were not jealous. Let Mr. Gale and me have our little talks. Do I ask you what you and Val Synnott talk about?” She went on with a little laugh, “About himself and his problems of life, I can answer for that. Mr. Gale does not talk about himself — anything else. Of course what the man is comes out. I am often conscious of something rigid in him, of his having too many fixed ideas. He has trained himself laboriously, and certain corners of his mind lack the effect of attrition with the world: he is a little too dogmatic, a little too much of a moralist. His notions about women are his own. To him a woman’s intellect is nothing; he does not deny us a trifle of wit, *esprit*, delicacy, but for any one of us to attempt to write, to paint, to invent, to argue a question is sheer waste of effort. Then I try to find out if it is beauty that moves him. But there he tantalizes and throws me off the track. Often enough I do not try to argue. I let him talk, and, Ayliffe, at such times I am almost willing to confess that man’s intellect is sovereign. We are clever, we pick up; the facets of our intel-

ligence can be polished and reflect a good many different lights. But to such a man the mere acquisition is no effort. With us it is the end, with him the means. Sometimes I have listened to him as if under a spell."

Ayliffe, too, listened as if under a spell.

"I do not always listen," Denise pursued. "There is no one else to whom I can talk so freely and so well. He can understand, and I am a clever woman, and one is not a clever woman for nothing. And he likes to let me talk on. He says of himself that he lives too much in a hard, dry light. But, after all, that is what one admires in him, that he is absolutely himself, absolutely single-minded and all of one piece, and carries with him an individuality of which the least observant person feels the force."

"Yes, I see that," Ayliffe exclaimed, anxious to have seen and felt something. "He is so good!"

"Good? I don't see that at all," exclaimed Denise. "There are possibilities in Mr. Gale beyond mere goodness. Well, as I say, I like his ideas, I like his mental atmosphere. There is a sort of charm in it, and

you do not object to my being carried away?"

"Object!" Ayliffe murmured. "Why should I object?"

"He considers you something very precious," Denise now continued with a deep glance, "something precious, but frail, like a crystal vase. I can imagine that many things he talks to me about frankly he would not like to utter before you. You are so pretty, so delicate, so nice, one loves the bloom on you. One is also a little in fear of your being shocked, — as Val Synnott quoted the other day, 'Her eyes look as if they would expect too much of me at breakfast.'"

"Was he alluding to me?" said Ayliffe.

"It was a quotation. Of course, when a man like Val Synnott is weighing the thought of marriage, he looks at the woman he is in love with all round. But I can assure you, Ayliffe, it is that pure, untouched quality in you that makes men like you so much — far better than they like me."

"But they do not!" cried Ayliffe, with conviction.

"Not Val Synnott? Not Kenny? I wonder

sometimes that you do not pluck up spirit and dismiss Val altogether and accept Kenny. It would be the making of Kenny, and what could you not do with such a pocketful of money?"

"And I want a pocketful of money," said Ayliffe.

Denise gazed at her in suspicion.

"Did you actually mean that you have had losses in money?" she asked. "I thought it was some illusion, some beautiful air-castle that had vanished."

But if at the outset of the talk, Ayliffe had been of a mind to confide, it had passed.

"It was simply an illusion," she said. "Still, as I say, I should like a pocketful of money. How does one go to work to make it?"

"You can come and pose for me for a dollar an hour," said Denise. "I am making a set of illustrations for the 'Prism,' called 'The Débutante's Progress.'"

"I will pose for anything. How am I to look?"

"I want something refreshingly saucy and impertinent. I could do a great deal with such a model. But you would have to

put on a little hard and aggressive air. You aren't just the modern girl, Ayliffe; still I could adjust you to the environment and make a success of the pictures."

"How do you mean that I am not a modern girl?"

"To be modern is to insist upon being yourself, to care only to express yourself," said Denise. "You are twenty people at once, trying to please others. Even I am not sufficiently modern, because I have never been goaded hard enough. I may choose ugliness and deformity at times for subjects, but I hate them, all the same."

"So I am twenty people at once," said Ayliffe.

"You are a part of each of the aunts, of me, of Val Synnott — you are even partly Colette and Colotte," said Denise. She had risen and was now standing before the glass, adjusting her great plume-trimmed hat.

"I feel it — I know it," said Ayliffe. "I shall have to begin to be modern, to fight for what I want."

"Better take Kenny," said Denise. "I have sometimes almost decided to marry Kenny myself. There would be a zest in

overcoming his dislike for me. And there would also be a zest in the feeling that one had the chance to manipulate such an income."

Denise was going to a musicale to which Ayliffe was not invited. She offered to take her, but no — Ayliffe refused.

"It will put me in a bad temper," said Denise. "It always does when I hear music I love — to think that I, too, am not a musician. Had anybody really cared for me when I was young, had had any insight into my being and the essence of my idea, it would have been seen that I was born to be a musician. I should have been made to study, to practice, to acquire the technique. I feel it in the tips of my fingers, that it is all there. And after I hear any one play music that I love in the way that I love it puts me into a state of exaltation. I sit down at my piano, and often enough really beautiful musical ideas and phrases come to me. But I cannot command them."

She kissed Ayliffe and went on to the musicale.

VIII

SYNNOTT IS WEIGHED IN THE BALANCE

Now and then comes to each of us what might be called the psychological moment, in which with kindled vision we seem to understand the why and wherefore, the whence and whither of things. Ayliffe experienced this after her talk with Denise, following upon the revelation made by her guardian. If a belief that the world had been carefully arranged in order to promote the comfort and happiness of Ayliffe Grant had received a crushing blow, at least it was met by a rebound of courage. It is true that she nursed a grievance. Her predominant sentiment was that she was very angry with Richard Gale. The torment of the situation lay in the fact that he had never deceived her; he had simply permitted her to deceive herself, had humored her vanity, no doubt finding some amusement in letting her go the full length of her tether. Yet, although everything, as by a flash of lightning, had

grown terribly distinct, it seemed to Ayliffe that it was just this particular misfortune that she had all her life been fighting in her dreams. Face to face with it, it was strangely familiar. Mr. Gale had sometimes said, "I wonder, Ayliffe, if you have a mind for tonics."

At this moment Ayliffe felt braced; a novel sense of power had come to her. She experienced, besides emotion, excitement — a sort of elation that she at last knew the worst that could happen. She said to herself, "I needed just this to be myself, to prove myself."

Richard Gale was probably not without anxiety about the way Ayliffe was taking it, and he came in on the following day on the pretext of bringing Mrs. Ritter some choice bulbs and flower seeds. He asked Ayliffe for five minutes' talk, and she went downstairs with him and led him into the little parlor just off the dining-room.

"It troubles me a good deal, Ayliffe," he said, beginning on the instant. "It is all so sudden. You will need money in the future just as you have needed it in the past, and it must be arranged."

"I had thought of it," said Ayliffe. "You have given and given, and I am not sure that for a time you will not have to go on giving. But, Mr. Gale, I wish you to understand that I intend to pay you back."

"You shall pay me back," said Mr. Gale. He looked at her with a half defiant smile. "You can pay me back easily. Indeed, I have felt ever since yesterday that I had robbed you of more than I could ever give you."

She did not take in his meaning, perhaps. "I shall pay you back," she said again.

He looked at her now with entire gravity. "You shall pay me back," he repeated.

"I suppose," she went on, "that you know just how much I owe you?"

"In dollars and cents?" Then, when she bowed her head, he went on. "Exactly. What else but dollars and cents? It shall all be put down in black and white, and when the right time for settling comes it shall be settled. Until then" —

He took a bit of paper out of his pocket and handed it to Ayliffe. Proud as she was, sure of herself as she was, the touch of it made her weak and uncertain.

"Oh, Mr. Gale," she faltered, "how can I take all this?"

"It is purely a matter of business," he said, dryly. "I hold your securities. This is but a temporary advance."

Ayliffe, with a momentary shiver, no longer hesitated.

"If it is a business arrangement," she said.

He nodded, bade her good morning, and had his hand on the knob of the door when she called him back.

"Perhaps I ought to tell you," she murmured. "I—I—promised to tell no one, but I have to confess that I did give Denise some idea"—

"Do you mean that you told Denise—Miss Alden—the terms on which we stand?" he demanded.

She wondered just what he meant by "terms."

"I tried to make her understand that I was not just as well off as I had believed," she said, after a little pause.

"Why try to enlighten her or anybody?"

"There is one person to whom I should like fully to explain my situation," she said.

He met her clear look.

"If you consider it necessary, do so," he said. "I think it is enough if you and I understand, Ayliffe." He waited a moment, with his eyes still on her face. "Nobody else can quite understand the situation," he then proceeded, "for you and I did not make the situation,—it was made for us. Try to understand that to do something for John Birckhead, to be able to show my loyalty to what I knew would be his wish, was a magnificent chance."

"Oh, you are generous, you are delicate, you are splendidly disinterested," said Ayliffe; "but oh, Mr. Gale, where do I stand? Where is my delicacy, my disinterestedness?"

"Wait a little," said Mr. Gale. "If I at last had my fine moment, why should not yours come? You have announced your intention of paying it all back."

"I shall pay you back," said Ayliffe.

She said it with a magnificent composure, and he received this reiterated statement with a little nod, shook hands with her, and went away.

The check he had given her was some-

thing tangible and intelligible, not only to Ayliffe, but to the aunts as well. It might be said to give an added feeling of security to the angoras and the dog. That it was besides a splendid spur to Ayliffe was her own secret. She had, she was obliged to confess, lived on without discontent in fog and vagueness; now she wanted the open daylight. She must go on keeping the secret from the aunts at least for a time, but it was a point of honor to tell one person.

At exactly five o'clock on a Saturday afternoon Valentine Synnott rang at the door in Washington Square, and on being admitted made his way upstairs to the drawing-room. Although April had come in, it was cold enough outside for the sight of the fire aglow in the low grate and the lamp burning under the tea-kettle to inspire the visitor with an intimate sense of the comfort and pleasantness of things. The fire seemed to burn for him, the tea-kettle was singing for him, and on the low table his favorite sandwiches and crumpets were set out. Not even the chocolates done up in silver foil, of which he was especially fond, were lacking. And by the table, charming

in a fresh gray gown, stood Ayliffe, with a bunch of narcissus in her belt; and if the visitor asked himself whether the radiance in her look and manner shone for him, it was like Valentine Synnott to accept the flattery of it. He advanced to the middle of the drawing-room, and then, in his deliberate way, stood still and looked at the girl. Something was in the air.

"The aunts are all away," said Ayliffe, her unparalleled audacity standing confessed. "They have all gone to the John Ritters' to a children's party."

"I am grateful to the children's party," said Synnott. He came up to Ayliffe with an extended hand. "Your aunts are all delightful," he went on. "I am in love with them, each and all. But what is one among so many?"

Ayliffe's cool fingers just touched his. Still there was something electrical in the thrill the contact gave him.

"I have the feeling of being a first-class intriguer," she said, peering into the teakettle. "When you spoke about coming to-day I said not a word about this engagement."

“ You were willing for once to let me see just yourself.”

“ The fact is,” returned Ayliffe, her face lighting up into laughter, “ that I wished to see you, just yourself. I want a father confessor.”

The water was far from boiling, and Ayliffe sat down behind the little table. Synnott took a chair on her right.

“ Good heavens ! ” he murmured. “ What sins have you been committing ? ”

“ That is what I long to know.” As she said this she glanced at him with her face all brilliant with laughter.

“ Do you expect me to give you absolution ? ” he asked.

“ I do not ask for absolution. I choose you for my father confessor because you are the most critical person I know, the most fastidious, the least easy to please.”

“ What a shocking character you give me ! ”

“ Not at all. There are times when one desires happy-go-lucky advice, an apology for letting one’s self drift. To-day I want no rose-pink optimism. I ask you to tell me home truths, to be as hard as nails.”

He was honestly puzzled. He leaned back, looked at the ceiling, rubbed his forehead with his hand, then brought it down, smoothing his cheek.

"Tell home truths — be hard as nails?" he repeated. He was going on, when she interrupted.

"Don't think of me as a young lady," she now exclaimed. "I am aiming at something quite beyond young-ladyhood. I am setting up as a clever, superior young woman."

He was still leaning back, looking at her, narrowing his eyelids as he watched.

"That is cruel. I have borne much from these clever, superior women. Hitherto you have been my compensation. Not that I have a low opinion of your cleverness, Miss Ayliffe Grant. What a man asks of a woman is that she shall be just bright enough to appreciate him."

"Achieving so much as that," said Ayliffe roguishly, "kindles a desire for something brilliant on one's own account. Being as clever as you say I am, I long to shine. What I have done" —

She paused, trembling on the brink of confession.

“ Out with it ! ”

“ I have written a novel.”

He affected to shudder.

“ One more lost illusion,” he said. “ Ever since I have known you, Ayliffe, I have said to myself, ‘ Here is one human being unspoiled by vanity and self-consciousness. Let me refresh myself at this divine spring.’ And all this time you were burning for achievement ! Why did you want to write a novel ? Surely you are not thinking of publishing it ? ”

Synnott had at need a wonderfully sympathetic gift of manner. At this moment he was on his guard, and showed a slight coldness.

“ I thought,” said Ayliffe, “ as you are reader and general literary adviser to ” —

“ Ah ! you want my opinion as to what to do with your novel,” he said. “ My advice is, throw it into the fire.”

She quoted : —

The world doth say, my gentle Dyer,
Your odes do very much want fire ;
Repair the fault, my gentle Dyer,
And throw your odes into the fire.

“ Oh, I do not suppose,” said Synnott,

with vehemence, "that your novel lacks brilliance, electric lights, lime lights burning in every color. Women's novels are apt to be a little lurid. Ayliffe, I am sorry to be discouraging, but I am the last person in the world for you to apply to. I hate women's novels."

She had grown pale. He began to see that her pretended high spirits came from the flickering up of some mental excitement that had either soon burned itself out or that his frankness had extinguished.

"I know so much about women's books," he went on, remorselessly. "I have as reader to decide on the merits of the manuscripts submitted to the firm, and as critic to look through the books which are sent to the periodicals. The worth of a novel comes from the breadth and truth of its way of apprehending life. One does not want a woman to apprehend life with breadth and truth; in fact, she never does. Occasionally we have a book written by some woman who has lived through everything and has n't a blush for the worst revelation she can offer. But, as a rule, knowing nothing, these young writers dream everything; their curiosity,

their lawless imaginations do not stick at a trifle ; their limited and circumscribed experience finds this escape pipe. I shouldn't like to have you join that band, Ayliffe."

He stopped, for she gazed at him appalled.

"I thought most people wrote to make money," she faltered.

"But you are not so sordid."

"Let me confess," said Ayliffe, plucking up a spirit, "that I wrote the novel partly to amuse myself and partly as an experiment. It was you who put it into my head, Mr. Synnott." She looked at him with some return of her former archness.

"I? You must be mistaken."

She went on : "It was one day when you were walking home with me from Denise's studio, and I said, 'It makes me long for a studio of my own, a little nook all to myself!' You looked at me in surprise, Mr. Synnott, and answered, 'It is all very well for a woman who has a career, — who writes or paints or models. But when a woman is simply a woman, she needs the background of a home.' It tormented me that you considered me simply a woman. We went to Belport just afterwards and it was very dull

that summer. Denise and her aunt were in Europe. I had all my time to myself, and I wrote this book."

Synnott, half ashamed of his savage fit, relented in some slight degree.

"You are spontaneous, and all that you do possesses individual charm," he now observed. "I dare say you write as naturally as a bird sings, and with some insight into nature and some instinctive feeling for the laws of art. The novel is possibly a delightful performance. I cannot imagine you stripping off each petal of the rose and leaving pistils and stamens bare, as so many of them do. But look at the matter, Ayliffe. You enjoyed writing the book, you say; if you try to publish it you will run the risk of losing all that sense of satisfaction, will simply be laying up disappointments and vexations for yourself. And of twenty novels that are published there is not more than one that is likely to make money for the author. And supposing your book turned out to be the one in twenty, you do not need the money."

"I am not sure that I have any money at all," said Ayliffe. As she spoke she did

not look at Synnott, but with a smile on her parted lips drew the table a little nearer the sofa and set about making the tea deftly and delicately. "When I wrote the book," she went on, with the same smile, "it was out of an irresistible impulse, and, that satisfied, I had no further ambition. But now I have become unblushingly sordid. I need some money and" —

"Need some money?" Synnott repeated, with a quick, sharp glance. "Surely you are joking."

Still she did not look up, but went on stuffing orange pekoe into the tea-ball, and then proceeded to pour the boiling water over it before she answered, "I am not joking, unless it might be called a practical joke to pose as a rich girl when actually I have little or nothing."

The tea was strong and clear. She knew his tastes, dropped into it two lumps of sugar and a slice of lemon, then set it down before him. Synnott, disregarding the attention, jumped up and put almost the whole distance of the room between himself and Ayliffe. Perhaps he was looking out of the window. His back was toward her, and she

saw that he had extended both arms, and was making a gesture as if to shake off an oppressive nightmare. The blow had hit him, — of that she felt sure. The whole man seemed to feel it and suffer before her eyes. She sat waiting until the bad moment was over. Presently he came back to his place, sat down, took up the cup of tea and drank it off at once.

“What you say surprises me very much,” he then remarked, in his usual manner. “Your tea is delicious. May I have another cup?”

Their glances met as she took the cup to refill it. Although he had regained command over his nerves and muscles, he was still pale, and his eyes seemed to have grown smaller.

“Do you mean that you have lost money?” he now inquired, with just the right air of friendly concern.

“I hardly seem to know whether I ever had any money,” said Ayliffe.

“Ah, it is your aunts, then, who are so well off.”

“We are a set of paupers all together,” said Ayliffe. She laughed. “I admit there

are two comfortable houses in the family," she continued, "but then how to live up to them! Do you wonder now, Mr. Synnott, that I am eager to see if my book can make a little something?"

Ayliffe had needed to state her case, and she had stated it. She had not realized the fact that she was putting Synnott to a severe test. His way of getting through the next five minutes was a curious study of the retreat of a skilled man of the world from a position taken up on a misconception of the facts of the case.

"Perhaps it will turn out a prodigious success," he said, with an easy air. "If you are really in earnest, we must see what can be done about it."

"I wanted advice," said Ayliffe.

He accepted a sandwich, even a crumpet. She had spread the table, made a feast for him, and there was a certain magnanimity in thus accepting her hospitality. Ayliffe sat smiling, but her whole soul and sense quivered into the perception that in accomplishing her purpose she had paid a great price. Quick sympathy, spontaneous warmth of feeling, she had not expected from Syn-

nott. What had she then expected, hoped, feared? Surely not that he would consider this a heaven-sent opportunity to tell her that he liked better to have her poor than rich. Such infatuation would have surprised her more than this aloofness. Still, she might have counted on something finer from him. Her instinct, sounding him through, detected embarrassment. She felt no anger, only a strong thrill of conviction that this experience must cost her unspeakably. So far, however, it had only stimulated Ayliffe. Synnott saw the girl transfigured. Her eyes were flooded with light, her whole expression dazzled and confounded him; but he had rallied his powers.

“I had always taken for granted that you were a rich girl,” he now said, setting down his cup and transferring all his attention to her. “Were I a man who ever fell in love or played the part of suitor to any woman alive, I should almost suspect that I was being put to a test. For of course I remember how Miranda set Ferdinand to log-rolling, and how Portia brought forth her three caskets. I always knew that I should never have come successfully out of

any such ordeal. I should have passed by the leaden casket. And certainly the most bewitching of girls could not tempt me to break my back carrying faggots. In these unheroic days a woman might well give a man a chance to prove his disinterestedness by declaring she was poor. But you and I are not on those romantic terms. I am your good friend, and I want you to be frank and to tell me just what has happened."

Ayliffe sat with her hands crossed on her lap, looking straight away from him.

"Nothing in particular has happened," she answered.

"Did n't you once tell me something about some mines that your father was interested in?"

All the light and color had gone out of Ayliffe's face. "I once had some such idea," she murmured.

"Now, Ayliffe, I am a very old friend," he said, kindly. "I want to understand the case."

Clearly, what he felt now was a resolution to get to the heart of the matter. He asked question after question, then burst out, "Ayliffe, your guardian is cheating you!"

"You do not understand," said Ayliffe.

"Then let me understand."

"That is what I wish," she said, speaking very quietly. She told him the whole story of her father's loss of health; of his giving up his practice in New York and undertaking fresh enterprises in the West, then of his death and his widow's accepting John Birckhead's trusteeship.

"I knew John Birckhead well," said Synnott. "There are few men I ever believed in more."

Ayliffe went on and told how after her mother's death Mr. Birckhead became her guardian, then of his sudden death without a will. From this moment Ayliffe faltered, was first crimson, then pale, but she continued the recital.

"I don't quite get the idea," he said, interrupting.

Ayliffe started, as if she felt the sting of a lash across her face. She rose and walked away, Synnott following her. "Has Gale been using up what capital your father left?"

"No," she answered, with a strange look.

"I do not understand," he said again.

“No, you do not understand,” said Ayliffe. “Nobody but I, Ayliffe Grant, who have been treated with such unprecedented generosity that I feel humbled to earth, can expect to understand. My father’s investments turned out to be worthless, — at any rate, at present unavailable.”

“Do you mean that John Birckhead and Gale” —

“That is exactly what I mean,” said Ayliffe. She looked like a hunted creature at bay. He gazed at her with a straight, hard glance, some ingredient in the thought behind it making itself felt.

“You will marry Gale,” he said, in a deep voice.

“No, no, no!” she exclaimed indignantly.

“Surely you must know that no man would be so disinterested as to” —

“He said it was a part of his debt to Mr. Birckhead,” faltered Ayliffe. “When Mr. Birckhead was dying he promised him” — Then, with a heightening of consciousness, she cried, “Do not imagine, Mr. Synnott, that I am denying my folly in being so credulous. Remember that I was very

young and that I accepted it quite simply."

"I am certain that he wants you," said Synnott, almost roughly. "Has he not asked you to marry him?"

"If he did" — she began, and broke off.

"Ah, you admit it. I was sure of it."

"It was just to save my feelings," she said faintly.

"Did you refuse him?"

"Of course."

"But you will marry him?"

She shook her head.

"I wish I had the right to advise you. I should tell you to marry Gale," said Synnott. "You are very young, Ayliffe, — you don't begin to know how hard the world is. Denise Alden says that is the charm of you, — that you not only know nothing of the wickedness of the world, but that you have not even guessed the least jot or tittle of it."

"Denise is very kind."

"Ask her if you ought not to accept Gale."

Ayliffe laughed. "Ask her, when he is her constant visitor, with whom she walks, talks" —

Synnott's whole face kindled. "You do not mean to say that she has got hold of Gale?"

Ayliffe did not answer. She stood enigmatic.

"Did Gale tell you?"

"No, Denise told me."

"Is she painting his picture?"

"She said nothing of that."

Synnott was evidently confounded. "Was there ever such a woman?" he muttered. "Was there ever in the world such a woman? She is insatiable."

He saw by Ayliffe's glance that he was betraying himself.

"You think she means to marry him?" he now asked. "Is that the reason you — You have a kind of delicacy that Denise has not an inkling of." He came up to her and took her hand. "Dear, sweet, good little Ayliffe," he said, "I must go now. You have given me a great deal to think about. I must come again and talk over the book." He seemed to be in very great haste, but added, "If you want my services, command me in any way."

"I ask only one thing," said Ayliffe,

“and that is that you will be absolutely silent concerning what I have told you to-day. No one else is to know it,—not my aunts, not Denise, not any one else in the wide world.”

“Your secret is absolutely safe with me,” Synnott replied. He had taken her hands one in each of his, and now lifted first one and then the other to his lips. “Poor little girl,” he murmured, “I would have died to save you from all vexation and trouble.” He did not wait to see that his kindness had brought tears.

IX

AT BELPORT

FOR the next fortnight Ayliffe threw herself into the occupations incidental to the spring flitting to Belport. More than once during her interview with Valentine Synnott she had experienced a sensation like a shiver of cold. The shiver remained, a waft of that chilly breath of disinheritance, dispossessing her of so much that she had hitherto counted on with assurance.

Denise had affirmed over and over that Ayliffe was in love with Synnott, and Denise was clever in all such mysteries and subtleties. Certainly Synnott had counted for a great deal in Ayliffe's life. He and Denise had been the audience, as it were, to whom she had played, the spirit of her part being dashed at times by a sense of the futility of attempting completely to satisfy either. Polly Cameron had often said that Ayliffe never put on a ribbon without thinking of

Denise. Denise's look and tone, Synnott's approval, or the cold douche of his disapproval, had indeed governed the girl's opinions, likings, and dislikings. Denise had seemed to plant herself as it were in Ayliffe's path and challenge her at every step; and Ayliffe, while conscious of this, was also conscious that life would not have been half so well worth having if Denise's competition had not put zest into the smallest matter. As for Synnott, her wish to meet and answer his expectations had taken on all sorts of pretty hues of sentiment. Now, without this rainbow glint on her bubble, life must turn very dull and gray. It had been her habit to consider herself in love with Valentine Synnott. One does not get over a habit in an instant, and Ayliffe expected when the moment of reaction came to suffer deeply. What she thought of at present was not in the way of romance, however. The quivering tip of her pain and revolt was in the bitter irony of the whole situation. She writhed over the recollection of Richard Gale's saying, "If Synnott offers himself send him to me." She understood so well now what certain test was to be

applied to the disinterestedness of any man who approached her as a suitor, that the vision of Synnott before her guardian set her on the verge of laughter. It would have been a wonderful stroke, but she was glad that she had saved Synnott from such a probing of his motives.

But all these perturbations of mind now gave way to practical activities. The transportation of the four aunts and the two domestics, the angoras and the terrier to Belport demanded all Ayliffe's faculties and resources. Each aunt had, besides her individual properties, her individual views as to how each of her precious possessions should be packed. Each aunt began by believing that by no conceivable effort could she be ready by a certain date, nor could her belongings be crowded into the allotted space. All these difficulties had to be so subtly met by Ayliffe that each aunt believed that the difficulty was being solved according to her own cherished dogma and tradition.

Richard Gale, who had of late got into the habit of looking in every day at the house on Washington Square, was not slow

to offer his services, and often made himself useful. Rather to her own surprise, Ayliffe had of late found herself on a more intimate footing than she had ever been with her guardian. Either a chill had vanished from his manner, or else she had lost the old dread of his criticism ; or was it the feeling that he and Denise were somehow in fellowship that made it more easy for Ayliffe nowadays to be simple and candid with him ? He was, at any rate, most kind and helpful these last days in New York : managed the aunts, took all the knottiest tasks upon himself, and finally, when they set out on the journey, carried Fido in his arms and the angoras in a basket to the train.

"I do not know how you will ever be rewarded," Ayliffe once said to him.

"I do," he replied. "I intend to go up to Belport to see you all."

"Do come !" said Ayliffe. She looked at him roguishly. "Denise told me you would visit them in apple-blossom time."

"Yes, Mrs. Campbell has asked me to visit them in apple-blossom time," he returned imperturbably, putting down her roguishness with a high hand.

Belport lies stretched along the bay made by the Bell River, where it empties itself into Long Island Sound. The wide, elm-bordered streets of the quiet old town rise on the one hand toward the hills, where they meet the country roads, and on the other they descend gradually to marshes and sands that end in the shifting play of low surf beating endlessly along the curving white beaches bordering the Sound. The Cameron house stood on a sort of bluff overlooking the harbor mouth. Toward the north was the many-bridged river winding away to the hills; toward the east and south the broad mirror of the bay, taking on all sorts of lights, was framed against the blue shores of Long Island. Not far away were the docks where black-hulled schooners and sloops lay at anchor. Close at hand in summer time would lie moored smaller craft of all kinds, and among them would presently ride Kenny Jocelyn's yacht, the *Brünhilde*. Nearer still a creek wound through the meadows, where lay fishing boats with lines of masts at every angle crossing and re-crossing each other, and all responding to the rise and fall of the tide twice a day,

— gliding, swelling, surging inward at its flood, then at its ebb dropping away silent as a dream.

Ayliffe had longed for the quiet and solitude of Belport, expecting to feel the snap of the sharp tension to which she had held herself of late. She had had all the time the sense of *something to come*, something to be suffered. Nevertheless, the thing to be done now was to settle the aunts. The Cameron house, with its two galleries, one above the other, faced the west, looking toward church and churchyard and the red stacks of the chimneys that belonged to Thomas Campbell's great house of yellow brick and Portland stone. The timbered and shingled Cameron house dated back to the end of the eighteenth century, and was set in a great square of lawn round which ran a quadrangle of wide flower-beds. Beyond the flower-beds rows on rows of herbaceous plants developed into beautiful shrubberies. Not only each one of the aunts, but Ayliffe herself, was jealous of every bud that had swelled and opened before they came. Not to have had every hour of snow-drop and crocus was to have lost something.

All through the masses of azaleas, lilacs, deutzias, and japonicas were sweet violets, forget-me-nots, and English daisies, growing wild, keeping their footing where they could find shade and moisture. As for narcissi of every sort, they had taken kindly to the soil and multiplied for generations, maintaining themselves in rivalry with the ever new varieties of bulbs in the Dutch garden. The Dutch garden lay behind the house on either side of the trellis walk which led to the summer house overlooking the tide meadows. This walk was set with pillars, over which was a trellis where every sort of vine and creeper, from wistaria to moonflower, rioted in luxuriance. It was called the arbor walk, and one of the favorite grievances of the aunts was that the Thomas Campbells' nomenclature for their elaborate arrangement of pillar and trellis was a "pergola." Why a "pergola"? However, the arbor walk had its triumph in answering every condition for which Thomas Campbell's Scotch gardener strove in vain. Each side of the arbor walk was set out with bulbous plants of every description, as if hyacinths, tulips, and lilies were needed to lend poetry

to the beans, peas, parsley, asparagus, lettuce, cauliflower, and celery farther on, planted row on row, up to the currant, raspberry, and blackberry bushes set in order. And then on the slopes beyond extended the orchards to the stables. Homer himself would have loved such a garden as that belonging to the old Cameron place. Many and many a time had Ayliffe's heart swelled with tenderness over the thought that it was actually her income that made it possible for Polly and Mrs. Cameron to keep it up, maintaining Calvin Blake, who lived in the cottage and looked after house and grounds all the year through. Oh, how spoiled that old peace of mind would have been for Ayliffe could she not have said to herself, "I shall pay him back, — yes, it shall all be paid"!

However, with that sop to throw to her conscience she found the place so beautiful this spring, with the young gold and green foliage quivering in the sunlight, that she was ready to dance out of sheer intoxication. Fido, equally exhilarated, ran in circles round the green sward, while Colette and Colotte, excited by the flash of wings, the

trill and twitter of every flying creature, not content with play, longed for sport, and with every primitive tigerish instinct alert, would have been glad to turn with tooth and claw on the robins. Ayliffe, however, stealing a leaf out of a fable, had defeated these murderous intentions by tying a little silver bell at the throat of each. Calvin, the gardener, stableman, factotum, had belonged to the place for forty years. He was very deaf, but had never confessed it, disguising his infirmity at times by an air of being lost in deep meditation on really important subjects, and again jumping at conclusions, and, at least to his own satisfaction, fastening on what he believed to be the gist of any remark addressed to him. Conversations with Calvin were apt to run in this wise:—

Miss Polly : Now, Calvin, I hope you are putting more peas in the beds than you did last year. We were at least three crops short.

Calvin : Yes, Miss Polly, I have been thinking a good deal about these here Japanese plants. That must be a strange country where they come from. I'm told it's a mere island with a grand power of volcanoes under it. Now, I've been used to

flowering things all my life, and I can see reason in the blossoms of most of them, but there's a capacity about them crimson Rambler roses and them hydrangeas and clematis paniculata that takes away my breath. Why, if the oaks and the elms and the maples had such a push behind them it's the sky would be crowded out.

Ayliffe: I told you, Calvin, to give plenty of room to the ramblers. Some people believe in staking down the canes as soon as they begin to bud.

Calvin: There's no sort of fault to be found with the raspberries so far as I can see, Miss Ayliffe. But then it's a lady's way not to see things in a cool, convincing manner, but to insist on pouring oil into the fire.

In spite of these oracular utterances, Calvin, when allowed to go on without interruption or criticism, was a good companion and had no little to impart. He had stored up many a small surprise for Ayliffe, and enjoyed leading her to a slope all blue with violets, or to a fresh bit of rockery he had contrived, nodding with scarlet columbines.

"There's a joy, Miss Ayliffe, in getting to the heart of the thing," he would say.

Yes, there was a joy in it. In fact, Ayliffe half apologized to herself for being so happy. Let her reckon with Richard Gale as she might, was there not still that heartbreak for Valentine Synnott which had been postponed until she should settle down at Belport? The fact was, however, that here at Belport the idea of Synnott seemed speedily to efface itself. He did not belong to this environment. What would he have cared about the coming back of the birds? Would he have exulted with her that the thrushes were building again in the tulip tree, and that the wrens had retaken possession of the boxes? Would he have wondered over the great dark-eyed pansies cropping up in unexpected corners, or at finding that the foxgloves, which had been sending out pickets year after year, had really established themselves in solid phalanxes round the fruit trees in the orchard? Ayliffe did tell Richard Gale about this invasion, expressing wonder at the way the seeds were transported so far, when he surprised her by quoting, —

In a gossamer globe or thickly padded pod,
Some small seed dear to God.

She looked up at him almost startled. "I had not supposed you cared about flowers," she exclaimed.

"Of course not. What should I care about flowers?" said Richard Gale. "It's the snake in the garden of Eden that lawyers have to look up and make terms with."

Ayliffe often repeated that line, —

Some small seed dear to God,

as she went round the place afterward, and was grateful to her guardian for suggesting it. Probably Denise had read it to him, she said to herself, for Denise had found just that sort of cleverness and interest in Mr. Gale which had made her long instantly to appropriate him. But then Denise knew how to evoke the emotional qualities of men. Richard Gale's errand in coming to Belport at this time was to find a summer retreat. He had engaged two rooms at Lloyd's, and was to come and go as he saw fit. He was engaged in writing a commencement address for a western college, he explained; besides, he had an engagement at the Law School for the next year for which there was some preparation to be made. He offered

all these good reasons for coming to Belport with a little hesitation — almost embarrassment — at which Ayliffe was ready to smile. He had never before come to Belport in the summer for more than an hour; but then, he had never before been in love with Denise Alden.

The aunts were all alive in Belport. Here they were a part of all that they met. In New York everything was tame; there was nothing interesting to do — little to talk about except the news from Belport. Life there called out no sympathy, no interest; they could not help holding themselves a little aloof. Here they responded to the least event, — for here really exciting things happened. A blue flower came out to-day, replacing the yellow one of yesterday, while the color of the one to open to-morrow was still a subject of conjecture. There were inexhaustible discussions over the strawberry beds, as to all the fruits, above all, as to whether this would turn out to be “a good apple year.” Then the neighbors. In New York people were all made by the same pattern, all run by the same mainspring, and all wound up by the same key, while here

not only each family was known by its characteristic traits, but each man, woman, and child, all the servants, horses, dogs, and cats possessed each a separate entity. Here were Dr. and Mrs. Binney, the clergyman and his wife, with all the church and Sunday-school interests; Dr. Rathburn, the medical man, and his wife, with the library, civic and village improvement enterprises. Here was also the whole clan of Camerons: the Donald Camerons, the Andrew Camerons, and the Donaldsons, with all their collaterals. Then the Thomas Campbells and the Jocelyns were shortly to come.

AYLIFFE DISMISSES ILLUSIONS

IMPOSSIBLE but that Ayliffe should suffer some fluctuations of spirit as signs of life appeared in the Kenny house. Certain thoughts may exist without words; certain fancies, ideas, resolutions may be kept almost in solution, as it were, until there comes the new ingredient which precipitates them into shape and substance. Of course, behind Ayliffe's instant decision that the debt to Richard Gale should be paid was some tangible, even if vague, intention. She hid her face at the suggestion of it, but often woke up in the night obliged to confront it, argue it out with her conscience, and accept it anew. Even when she was putting Synnott's disinterestedness to the test she had known that fate had already marked out her course. Had she not, in fact, used her poverty like an umbrella to wave off the approach of any but a rich lover? It was essential that

she should marry for money. Not that she needed money for herself, but to be able to support the household she loved, and to pay back that money to the man who had given so generously and had received nothing. At this crisis Ayliffe, trying to grasp every possibility of the situation, had sent her novel to a publisher and had thought of Kenny Jocelyn. Everybody knew that Kenny had for months been on the point of offering himself to her, and it may as well be stated fairly that Ayliffe had decided to accept Kenny. This was the miracle that was to happen. This was the light that glimmered hopefully out of the fog.

Mrs. Jocelyn, born a Kenny in the old Kenny house at Belport, had lived in the village until her marriage with a great railroad magnate, and after his death had found her chief comfort in returning at stated intervals to nestle into her old home, disregarding the grandeurs which tried her spirit in her show cottage near Newport or her castellated mansion on the Hudson. Her son had promised to spend at least six weeks with her at Belport this year, and soon after the first of May Mrs. Jocelyn glad-

ened the hearts of all the village by arriving with her man-servants and her maid-servants, her horses and her cockatoo.

It would seem to be only one of those strange accidents which compel so many marriages that could explain Miss Sarah Kenny's becoming the wife of Daniel Jocelyn. His death a few years later had invested the widow with wealth which offered her no temptations to self-indulgence, but instead opened up responsibilities which made her shudder.

"I feel it my duty," she would say plaintively to her confidential friends, "to spend at least ——— thousand a year. Otherwise the money does roll up so terribly!"

We leave this blank for the imagination of the reader to fill up, for it represented to most of her auditors a capital on the income of which they could have lived comfortably to the end of their days. It may as well be said, however, that any difficulty in getting to the end of the amount which Mrs. Jocelyn felt it her duty to expend belonged to the years of Kenny's minority. The property was still in the hands of the trustees, and by the terms of Mr. Jocelyn's

will was to be administered by them until Kenny was thirty-one. Kenny's course was, indeed, hedged round by as many barriers as Kenny's father and his lawyers had known how to contrive. The event of his marriage with the consent of his mother and of the trustees would offer him a certain amount of freedom. Mrs. Jocelyn's present wish was to see her son well married. If from his earliest youth she had been afraid of his falling a victim to the manœuvres of some enticing fair one, nowadays she had begun to feel that he was not in danger of being carried away by the exclusive passion which belongs to more reserved and concentrated minds, indeed that he might never care to settle down at all. Life and love and enjoyment had come so easily to the young fellow that the imaginative, the spiritual side of existence seemed not to enter into his scheme of things. However, the trustees, the most authoritative of whom was Thomas Campbell himself, had of late put a curb on the young man, who had been reckless to the verge of audacity. Mrs. Jocelyn, without understanding the facts of the case, had been made very anxious, had appealed to

Kenny to take a wife, have a home, and submit to ordinary restraints. He had told her that he was delighted with the idea, that he only wanted her to do the picking out. Mrs. Jocelyn had named Ayliffe, and he had accepted enthusiastically, and was to come to Belport to finish up his wooing.

Mrs. Jocelyn was a handsome, melancholy-looking woman, with dark eyes and a pale olive skin. Although she was almost sixty years of age, with her tall, elegant figure, and her still beautiful hair untouched by time, her whole appearance was singularly youthful, yet serious and dignified. What gave singularity to the impression she created in her long widow's dress was the fact that her almost constant companion was a white cockatoo with a golden crest. The bird had been a pet of Mr. Jocelyn's, and had felt its master's death so deeply that his widow, who had hitherto disliked and even feared the bird, had made it a duty to win its affections. She had been successful, and by this time the cockatoo was never content when out of her sight, and its favorite perch was Mrs. Jocelyn's shoulder.

"The Mater wishes it would die ; I know

she does," Kenny often declared. "She would like to be Hinda with her lament, 'I never nursed a dear gazelle,' but I tell her cockatoos never die. They say Giacomo is already a hundred years old."

If Giacomo were indeed of that vast age, his sight had not failed nor his strength abated. His beak was so sharp and his grip so powerful that it was safer not to attack him. He had a very particular acquaintance with Fido, Colette, and Colotte. When Colette first saw the cockatoo strutting along the garden path she crept to a point of vantage and determined that, since he was neither robin nor chicken nor any known bird, he was appointed to be her prey. Giacomo advanced undaunted, apparently not observing that the cat was crouching for a spring. Nevertheless, looking out of the corner of his eye, he did see her; and what happened was that, instead of her catching him, he caught Colette by the ear, uttering at the same time a discordant screech. All that summer Colette and Colotte and Fido hid themselves in fear of their lives at Giacomo's approach. That was, however, three years ago, and by this time a kind of friend-

ship existed among the four pets. Indeed, nowadays Giacomo constantly sought the society of Fido and the angoras, and would fly over to the house by himself, look them up, and be entirely content to sit looking at the cats by the hour, with his head on one side, his whole air suggesting a sort of sardonic amusement.

Mrs. Jocelyn had not been in Belport for twenty-four hours before she came for Miss Honor and Ayliffe to take a drive with her up the river road. Mrs. Jocelyn had put her arms around Ayliffe and looked at her long and lovingly, telling her that she was a little thin and pale. Something in the older woman's tenderness touched the girl. Once out in the open air, rolling along in the luxurious carriage, her color and brightness returned. She needed to say nothing, — if Mrs. Jocelyn's eyes often rested on her, she gave her conversation wholly to Miss Honor, talking on in a dreamy, absorbed way about her own plans and Kenny's.

"When I am tired and lonely and drifting into a discouraged state of feeling, Kenny is always so good to me and cheers me up in a moment," said the loving mother.

"Oh, Kenny is cheerful," granted Miss Honor; "I should say he is as cheerful as any young man I know."

Mrs. Jocelyn accepted the concession. Yes, Kenny was cheerful, and a cheerful disposition was the most desirable thing in the world. It made such a difference in marriage, and Kenny was now thinking a great deal about marriage. He had begun to realize that the right sort of girl could do everything for him. He wanted something in his life sweeter, purer, better than himself.

"No one knows better than Kenny," Mrs. Jocelyn continued, in her soft, dreamy way, "that there are certain things in character, in daily life, in human intercourse that count, that are the basis of whatever is worth having."

Her eyes rested lovingly on Ayliffe's face. "I am quite sure," she went on, "that as soon as he is married these better things will become the ruling motives of his life."

Ayliffe was no longer pale. Slightly flushed, with something peculiarly bright about her glance, and something subtly withdrawn in her smile, she sat opposite Mrs.

Jocelyn and accepted this tribute. It had to be borne. When they reached the Cameron house on their return they found the cockatoo much ruffled and displeased with the cats, who had been taking liberties, and he rejoined his mistress with an air of relief. Ayliffe watched the carriage drive away, and then, instead of entering the house, walked down the arbor walk. She had had a trying hour, and she had to confess to herself that it was only the beginning of trying hours. She was troubled by the disingenuousness of her own mind. She sat down on the bench in the summer-house and looked off towards the water.

“After all,” she said to herself, “it needs only a little courage. I really like Kenny, and Mrs. Jocelyn thinks I can do him good. It is something in this world to do good to any one. Once married and settled down, I dare say everything will seem easy, and the feeling that I can pay Mr. Gale and go on making the dear aunts happy must carry me through the worst. It is not heartless in me. As far as I myself am concerned I am not in the least mercenary. I know myself; I can trust myself. The very fact that

my whole heart is not in it will help me to do my duty."

She had been looking resolutely seaward. Now she gave a little shiver, dragged off her gloves, and, holding up her slim white hand, looked at the third finger as if trying to accustom herself to the thought of its being encircled by an engagement or a wedding ring.

"I should like," she pondered, "to be a weak woman and to submit to destiny. I do not like to be a strong woman and to determine my fate! But I will not be a poor creature. I will not accept a wretched state of fluctuation and irresolution. I will look the facts of my life straight in the face and try to do the best thing I can." That was to accept Kenny if he asked her to marry him. She held at bay every feeling of diffidence, dread, regret. "Why, I could count twenty girls in New York who would jump at Kenny if he offered himself," she now said to herself by way of argument. "They have outraged good taste and delicacy in the way they have tried to pin him down. In each case it was a desire for his money. I too think of his money,

but not in the way of self-aggrandizement. There is a distinct obligation thrust upon me, and what I need is courage."

Being imaginative, she was able to project her mind into the future, and see herself maintaining the rôle she had decided to play to the end with sweetness, self-abnegation, and dignity. The only trouble was that torturing possibilities seemed to pierce through the surface of this pleasing picture. She was ready to hate herself, accuse herself, condemn herself. But then, her whole soul would have drawn back from the idea of marrying Kenny if she had associated happiness with it. It was her unique comfort that marrying him was to be the unceasing daily discipline of a long life. She must seek comfort from heaven, not from earth, withdrawing from any idea of individual happiness.

Upon this involved state of mind of Ayliffe's, Denise Alden was now to supervene, for by another week Thomas Campbell, with his wife and niece, had taken possession of his Belport place. If Denise in town and Denise in the country were two different Denises, it was partly that Denise liked al-

ways to dress her part, and had a different line of frocks, hats, gloves, shoes, and belts, but also that Mrs. Campbell's scheme of rural life was to go in for simplification. "I think," she would say, "that when one goes into the country one likes to simplify one's life." The wide piazzas of "The Cottage" were furnished with bamboo chairs, tables, and divans piled with cushions and rugs of the brightest Oriental dyes. Each room was distinctively Chinese, Japanese, or Moorish. The dining-room was Dutch, all the china delft, and all the silver of the quaintest old Dutch patterns, adorned with ships, windmills, and storks. Miss Honor Grant used to gasp at Mrs. Campbell's "simplifications." Miss Honor's own way of simplifying life in Belport was to wear a short skirt of serge, stout boots, and a broad-brimmed hat tied down over her ears.

It was Ayliffe's habit to drop in every morning and find Denise in the atelier she had fitted up on the top floor of the clock tower just under the dial. In the afternoon Denise returned the visit, and the two girls and any chance visitors had tea in the summer house overlooking the water.

"Oh, how I hated New York!" was Denise's exclamation on one of these afternoons, when she found Ayliffe waiting for her. "I missed you so! After you were gone I seemed not to get hold of people, only of their ghosts."

Ayliffe was making tea in a queer-shaped teapot of Russian brass. Not finding the whole of Denise's meaning in her words, she waited.

"In fact, Ayliffe, you spoil me for other women," Denise went on. "I seem to care for none of them. I avoid them. Yet seeing men exclusively makes one a little hard. Don't you think so?"

"How can I possibly know?" Ayliffe was quick to reply, "when I have seen only the four aunts, Colette, Colotte, Fido, and the cockatoo?"

"Has not Mr. Gale been to Belpport?" Denise was as swift to ask.

"Once. We walked round the garden, and he preached to me."

"Preached? About what?"

"About being myself. He was interested in the fact that so many different flowers grow out of the same soil under apparently

the same conditions. He told me to observe that each plant has its distinct identity, feels solely its obligation to live its own life, and that only."

Denise's eyes traveled over Ayliffe's face as she spoke.

"Well?" she said, unsatisfied.

"Well," replied Ayliffe, "I told him that it might be an easy matter for a larkspur to be simply a larkspur and no more, but that a girl was obliged to be a little of everything." She laughed as she spoke.

"What did he say then?" Denise demanded.

"He told me to study the laws of my own being."

"I recognize Mr. Gale in all that," said Denise, laughing. "He thinks you try to please too many people."

"Did he say that to you?"

"Something like it, — that you fritter away your powers."

Ayliffe's heart contracted sharply. "I hate to be discussed," she said with spirit. "I am well aware that I am commonplace, have little originality. It is not worth while to expect anything surprising from me. A

man like Mr. Gale would never think of talking to me as he does to you."

"Perhaps you are not one of those that they call men's women," said Denise. "But I dislike men's women; I am only afraid I may become one. I want you to help me."

"Help you — how could I?"

"I want to do my work," said Denise. "I want not to be distracted. I want to find out my own mind as you have found out yours."

Again Ayliffe felt Denise's eyes travel over her face with a consuming scrutiny. She would have liked to be frank. She reproached herself for having at this moment no impulse to say to Denise that she had found out her own mind and wondered at it hour by hour and day by day. But then such a cleverly made up mind brings the penalty of being so cleverly made up that one is not carried away by it on a wave of feeling; and now, while Denise sat on a bench, in a white serge dress made with consummate elegance, she absorbed the glories of the afternoon lights on the water, and was too splendid a picture to be approached without some sophistication.

“What is one to find out one’s own mind about?” Ayliffe inquired. “Do you mean to tell me, Denise, that you are in love?”

“If I were in love I should not need to make up my own mind.”

Denise pulled off her gloves and pushed her hat off her forehead. The tea was ready, and she accepted a cup, and slowly stirred a lump of sugar into the slice of lemon. “I read somewhere lately a droll story about a little girl,” she proceeded, “who when exhorted for her soul’s sake to leave off something during Lent — perhaps candy — said, ‘No, surely not candy. I could never get along without candy. But I might give up soap. How would soap do?’”

While Ayliffe laughed, Denise drank off her tea thirstily, then added, whimsically, “Now, when a question comes of being in love, one can decide it by thinking what particular person one could or could not get along without. For at a pinch one could dispense with, say” — She paused, and held out her cup to be replenished, and again Ayliffe felt her glance — “say Valentine Synnott,” she added, with a laugh,

which Ayliffe joined in, almost to her own surprise.

Could it be that she too could dispense with Valentine Synnott as an artificial enhancer of her life? Still she waited to have Denise complete her sentence.

"But one could not get along without — say" — Denise now observed, with the same tantalizing glance.

"Do you mean Kenny Jocelyn," questioned Ayliffe, mischievously, "or is it Major Coulson?"

"You know very well that I mean Mr. Gale," said Denise quite simply. "I really begin to believe that he is necessary to you."

"Necessary to me?" cried Ayliffe, nettled. "The one man who criticises me, condescends to me, dictates to me, crushes me with a sense of my own inferiority, — do you call that being necessary?"

"You do not wish to keep him, then?"

"Keep him?" echoed Ayliffe, "I keep Mr. Gale? Not for a moment!"

"Will you give him up to me?" said Denise. "Will you give him up to me absolutely?"

“Absolutely and with all my heart,” said Ayliffe.

“I wanted to be sure,” Denise now said. “Of course, it is the charm of existence to rob some women of their spoils, but not you. Ayliffe, I do mean always to be true to you though thick and thin. Am I not? Have I ever played unfair?”

Ayliffe brought her hands with a quick movement to her breast and clasped them there. “Oh, Denise — unfair? Never, never, never!” But while she said this her voice seemed to lose itself in something like a sob. “As for Mr. Gale,” she went on, “I should love to see him” —

She broke off, and for a moment felt it impossible to go forward or back. But Denise drew her own satisfaction from the unfinished sentence.

“All I want is a free hand and a clear conscience,” she now said. “He is coming up often, — not to “The Cottage,” although Aunt and Uncle both asked him. Uncle Thomas likes him particularly, and says that no man is good for anything who did not have a hard time in his youth. Perhaps that explains the pungent quality I

find in Mr. Gale's companionship. Well, what will happen will happen. He comes up to rest. He says he feels the need of recreation. Oh, how I envy a man who belongs to a practical profession, one that presents instant exigencies which must be met, mastered, and dismissed! It is only in art and literature that at the risk of accepting what is too facile, too commonplace, one cannot command one's powers, and one says, 'I cannot do it to-day — but by to-morrow, by next week.' One grows so feverish over the perpetual doubt and delay! Oh, to have accomplished something, to hold one's achievement in one's hand!"

Ayliffe looked at her aghast. "If you feel this, what do you think of me?" she faltered. "I, who have done nothing, who can do nothing."

"Oh, you constantly find alleviations for any state of mind," said Denise. "A new flower, the song of a bird suffices. There is something in you that never palls."

Ayliffe laid no flattering unction to her soul, but sat and gazed, looking dissatisfied and wistful.

"No, it is other women I am talking

about," Denise continued, "the women who make peace with their discontents, who accept any makeshift, any stop-gap; who, not attaining what they long for, fill up the deficit with what they can find; who resign the best and accept the second best, and then rather pique themselves on doing a fine thing, talk about destiny, or accept what they have brought upon themselves as a martyr's cross and expect to gain heaven by it."

Denise, aglow with scorn of what she was describing, had kept her eyes fixed on the changing lights across the broad water; now she turned and happened to see Ayliffe's face, flushed and tremulous. "Have I said anything to disturb you?" she demanded.

"Nothing but what is good for my soul," Ayliffe replied. "You have held up a mirror before me. Keep your ideals, Denise. Be thankful you do not have to make compromises with them and accept makeshifts."

"You talk as if you were accepting makeshifts," said Denise, as if petrified with astonishment.

But having said so much, Ayliffe was no longer in a mood for confession. Her secret

had for a moment looked out from its hiding place, and Denise was quick to catch a clue to it. To possess a secret and to baffle lookers-on was usually Denise's prerogative. Ayliffe's spirits, momentarily cast down, rose again, with a touch of mischief that she was usurping a rôle which did not belong to her, and which she must act up to with spirit. She decided to keep her secret of the swan's nest among the reeds until the birds had flown and the nest was empty.

XI

KENNY SCREWS UP HIS COURAGE

KENNY had come. All Belport felt the breeze of his presence. He was at this moment trying to persuade the whole household of aunts to go on a two days' expedition up the Sound in his new plaything, the yacht *Brünhilde*.

"It will do you good, Miss Honor," he pleaded; "it does not answer to settle down too much. Did you ever hear about my Aunt Martha, who went to Vevey for six months? The truffles in that region are very delightful, and she ate a great many — so many, indeed, that she found herself growing very stout. The doctor advised her to travel, and accordingly she packed up and sent for a carriage. But when the carriage came, the door was narrow, and she was so broad she could not get through. Accordingly she dismissed the carriage, unpacked, and went on eating truffles, and died not very long after."

"That seems to be a story with a moral," said Miss Honor, "but really I do not see that it applies to my case. I do not eat truffles, nor do I get particularly stout."

"The moral is," said Kenny, "that I want you to try my yacht, just a two days' cruise. She is a beauty; she goes like the wind. I am so proud of her that I dance all over the deck."

Kenny had run up twice during May to inspect the Brünhilde, and then had rushed back to town to look up something new in the way of expensive fittings and equipments. Now he had come for his six weeks' visit, and along with him had arrived a sudden wave of summer heat. The bright azure Sound, played across by breezes and alive with ripples, really seemed tempting.

"How many belong to the party already?" asked Miss Honor, with some severity, feeling an inclination which perhaps ought to be put down.

"Just my mother and the cockatoo and the two little cousins who are to arrive tomorrow."

"Oh, you are doing it to amuse the Kenny girls?"

“Oh, no,” said Kenny; “they are not to be amused. One does not expect to amuse them any more than one expects them to be amusing. I think my cousins are good girls,” he went on, confiding artlessly to the group. “I do not think they would do wrong — at least, not willingly. They have heard that the world is very wicked, and they expect to be shocked, in fact, are rather disappointed if they are not shocked. They look for the worst that can be said and done. They have awful imaginations.”

“They are sweet girls,” put in Ayliffe, indignantly — “just a little timid and shy.”

“Oh, yes,” said Kenny; “they expect to be frightened.”

“I suppose that Denise is going?” said Polly.

“Yes, and Thomas Campbell himself. I am not to be the only lion among ladies. Indeed, I saw Gale there just now, and I asked him. I rather like Gale. He can say less in the course of a couple of hours than any man I ever met. I wired Synnott, but he can’t get away until next week.”

The Brünhilde had ample accommodation

for twelve passengers, and Miss Honor and Miss Polly were persuaded to undertake the cruise. No one knows what an experience is until one has tasted the sweet and the bitter of it. There was to be no bitter in this. The Sound was like an unruffled lake; it would be moonlight, and there was a promise of a deliciously cool night on the open water. Then, besides, the four aunts of late were watching Ayliffe closely. It was all very well to suggest that the cruise was arranged for the Kenny girls; the fact was that nothing could well be more explicit than Kenny's air toward Ayliffe nowadays, and for the first time in their experience of that dear girl she showed a soft, kittenish demureness along with her high spirits. Yes, Miss Honor and Miss Polly decided that they must chaperone Ayliffe.

Mrs. Jocelyn, Giacomo, and the two nieces were already on deck when Miss Honor, Miss Polly with Fido in her arms, Ayliffe, Mr. Campbell, and Denise boarded the yacht two days later. Mrs. Campbell never stepped upon any kind of boat except with the specific purpose of reaching the nearest port in Europe, when her way was to retire at

once to her berth and keep it during the entire voyage. Mrs. Jocelyn probably liked the water as little as Mrs. Campbell, but Mrs. Jocelyn always considered it a virtue to do what she did not like to do; and besides, with a son like Kenny an anxious mother soon forgets personal inclinations and disinclinations. To be in sight of the sea and not to do all one may on the water, in the water, or under the water, was to Kenny dead negation. Accordingly, Mrs. Jocelyn and Giacomo had learned to accommodate themselves to any sort of sea craft in any sort of weather.

"I always take my knitting," she had observed to Miss Honor Grant. "I have discovered that if you can only fix your mind on something — give yourself up to some engrossing occupation — you are never seasick." Miss Honor, encouraged by this specific remedy against what she dreaded, had accordingly brought her own work-bag. She did not knit, but loved to embroider.

Kenny, it was explained, had driven over to Bradford to look up some indispensable article, and accordingly Mrs. Jocelyn and the Kenny girls took pleasure in showing off the

yacht, with its cleverly arranged little bunks and its endless contrivances for comfort in a nutshell. Miss Honor and Miss Polly eyed the neat stateroom allotted to them with a sort of poignant curiosity, thinking of a possible day of doom; for it must be confessed that the sun was beating down upon the yacht, and the sea scents and smell of fresh varnish overpowered the smell of the roses with which the saloon was decorated. Ayliffe, Ruth and Faith Kenny were to have the blue cabin.

"I wanted to give you mine," said Mrs. Jocelyn to Ayliffe, "but Kenny said that you yourself had insisted on this arrangement."

Ayliffe, blushing up to her eyes, tried to hold her own while Ruth and Faith looked her all over with that glance of quickened interest which showed that they were taking everything in, that their curiosity not only peeped, but penetrated. Denise had a little nook to herself, of which she had taken instant possession and now emerged from in a cap which matched her white wool frock and set it off with just the touch which marked her as an experienced yachtswoman.

Ayliffe, in an old blue serge, had not given herself a glance, but now she made a gesture of admiration toward Denise.

"Oh, I understand you," Denise said, as they came up the companionway. "There is a depth of simplification about you. Your art is to be above art — to require none."

Ayliffe, with eyes full of light and cheeks of shell-like pinkness, refrained from repartee. She was herself conscious of a depth of something, whether of simplification or mystification she could hardly have defined. She now proceeded to give her whole attention to the relations between the cockatoo and Fido. They had been asked to bring the dog to keep the bird company, but Giacomo, possibly missing Colette and Colotte, had received his guest with a harsh shriek as of dissatisfaction, and ever since had stood on one leg with one eye shut and his head on one side, regarding Fido with such a derisive air that the Skye had hidden himself under a chair and was sulking to his heart's discontent. Ayliffe was on her knees expostulating with Fido when Richard Gale came on board. While making his salutations he almost stumbled over her. She looked up,

meeting his perplexed, rather indignant glance, with her eyes full of fun.

"What a child you are!" he exclaimed.

"Am I not?" she returned, deprecatingly.

He took her by the hand and raised her to her feet.

"The only trouble," he went on, with pretended severity, "is that people sometimes consider you almost grown up. You yourself at times take a tone" —

"I know," she murmured, with contrition.

"But do not imagine," he proceeded, "that I think you are old enough to make up your mind on any subject. Do not dare to do it without asking my permission."

"Not the least little tiny thing?"

"Not the most insignificant thing."

She looked back at him with her eyes full of laughter. Then, turning away, she cried, "See Aunt Honor working away for dear life! Dear Aunt Honor, put down that embroidery this instant." For Miss Honor, with her wide-brimmed straw hat tied down over her ears, against danger of a possible gale, instead of sitting back comfortably in her chair, was perched upright on the edge,

and with spectacles on nose was attempting to do Kensington stitch.

"Mrs. Jocelyn was telling us that there is nothing like a fixed occupation to ward off seasickness," she explained.

Denise had beckoned to Gale, and he left Ayliffe to reason with Miss Honor.

"Already I am so tired of it all!" said Denise. "Already I am asking, Why did I come? Do I belong to this particular family party?"

"Do I?"

"I hope not," said Denise. "I am in hopes that you will take the trouble to save me from being bored looking on and seeing how everybody else is taken up with one central object. I hope you do not happen to be in love with Ayliffe."

Gale had drawn a camp-stool by the side of Denise's chair, and was looking at her with the same eager eyes, the same half smile, and the same cool manner that he had worn during the colloquy with Ayliffe.

"Into what mysteries you plunge me!" he said. "Is there any connection between your being bored and my being in love with Miss Grant?"

"There might be a very close connection," retorted Denise. "Still, when I said I hoped you were not in love with her it was because I foresee disappointment for all Ayliffe's lovers but one."

"And that one — who is he?"

"Do you need to ask? To-day it is proclaimed. Look at the dear girl addressing Mamma Jocelyn! Did you ever see anything so pretty as that manner?"

Gale looked across the deck with a sudden critical interest.

"Miss Grant certainly is charming," he said, as if observing it for the first time.

"It is just a sort of trick," said Denise. "She goes into it all as if she did not see one inch ahead, and yet she knows the whole affair is cut and dried. Kenny has promised his mother."

"Promised what?"

"To marry Ayliffe."

Their eyes met. "What do you think?" he inquired.

"About her accepting him? Of course she will accept him. I used to think she was in love with Val Synnott, but that seems to be over. In fact, I now believe it was Kenny

all the time. She longs to be rich, and taking Kenny is the easiest way. Allowing the widest margin for disappointment, marrying Kenny is the safest thing I know of."

"Why should she wish to be rich?" inquired Gale.

"Oh, Ayliffe has a practical sense."

"I am glad to hear it," he replied with a short laugh. "I have known her for some years, and feared that she was utterly unpractical."

"You approve of her marrying Kenny, then?"

"Here the conquering hero comes," said Gale, rising. And, indeed, at that very moment the person of whom they were speaking clambered on board resplendent in his white ducks, and with his air of breezy boyishness ran round the circle with outstretched hands and words of welcome. He was just in time. They could save the tide, and in another moment they were dropping down the harbor. From being anxious, in a state of suspense, bored to extinction, everybody was instantly in good humor, from Mr. Campbell and the skipper, who had been uttering words of doom on the expedition,

declaring it had better be given up until the next day, to the sailors, who had hung round listlessly, tightening each coil of rope, loosening the sheet, always with an eye to the weather, to see if there were any sign of the wind they were whistling for. The cook and his assistant resumed preparations for luncheon. In fact, the whole enterprise, which had for a bad half hour seemed a fraud and failure—just one of Kenny's jokes—took on a different aspect. Miss Honor and Miss Polly exchanged a glance of satisfaction as the yacht made its way down the bay in an easy, noiseless fashion, with an occasional flapping of the sails. Miss Polly declared that the soft murmur of the water against the bows was like a lullaby.

There was always that about Kenny which made things seem to move. When he came the curtain rolled up and the play began. His characteristic tendency to do everything too eagerly had its quality as well as its defects. His exuberant spirits eked out the deficiency of other people's. Mrs. Jocelyn lighted up; the Kenny girls hung on his least word. He made Miss Honor and Miss

Polly confess to a real Viking spirit, a desire for a life on the ocean wave, a home on the rolling deep. Thomas Campbell, who had always repressed and denied Kenny from his earliest boyhood, still had a lively respect for the plain figures of his schedule, and was ready to forgive a good deal of fooling. Even Richard Gale admired in Kenny what his own life of rigid self-discipline had made impossible for himself. Seen thus intimately, Kenny appeared to no little advantage, and one accepted a little swagger and a few antics for the sake of such good-nature and real kindness. If Richard Gale had hitherto been a little contemptuous of Kenny's chances with Ayliffe, at this moment he felt himself going over to the other side. Compared with Kenny, what had any other man to offer her? No wonder if, in her disappointment, her humiliation, Ayliffe longed for just the peace of mind such a marriage would assure her.

Ayliffe may have had to fight hard to preserve her dignity as she sat focused by at least six pairs of eyes. It is an easy matter to make up one's mind in private. It is quite another thing to stand by it when one

meets curiosity, interrogation, almost indignation on the faces of those one knows best. It is not strange that occasionally the girl's eyes fell and her cheeks grew red.

That Kenny had his own idea of how to conduct a courtship no one could have any doubt, and that he was trying to act up to that idea regardless of difficulties was clear. A spare capstan happened to be close to Ayliffe's chair, and he accepted this for his perch, and if every other moment he had to jump up and confer with Dexter, his own man, who was in charge in the dining-room, or give a point or two to the skipper, it only showed how anxious the host was to have the whole affair go off well. He might take a seat by Ayliffe, but he had plenty of good sense, and where conversation was concerned, like the sun he shone on all alike. He had no end of stories, some droll and others which had to be accepted for their probable good intention. Instinctively, as the keen salt air filled her with its own buoyancy, Ayliffe's spirits rose. The Brünhilde, taking the ebb, had met the flood tide as soon as she was in the Sound. A little wind came up with it, and she stood off toward the

east and began to make some headway. The Sound widened; the blue banks of Long Island looked farther away. Even the Connecticut shore took on a new aspect. They were really at sea. The stir of everything on board, the flapping of the canvas, the feeling of gaining wings as the vacillating puffs of air were succeeded by a steady breeze from the southwest, made the sea change palpable. Everybody was glad when luncheon was announced. The salt air had given an appetite to every member of the party. The little dining-room was cosy and pretty, and with every porthole open wide was swept by the welcome gale. It was redolent of flowers, too, for, much to Miss Honor's relief, the smell of varnish had vanished. Then, certainly, as far as food and drink were concerned, everybody's tastes had been provided for. Kenny had Miss Honor on one side and Miss Polly on the other, while Mrs. Jocelyn was flanked by Mr. Campbell and Richard Gale. The four girls were distributed between.

"Now, this is what I like," Kenny declared, his crimson face shining above his spotless ducks. "There is an old riddle,

‘When is a man not a man?’ and the answer is, ‘When he is a board.’ Now that’s the time when I am most a man. I never feel so much at home as when I am at sea. If it were not for you, mother dear, I am not sure that I should not live on board my yacht altogether; that is, if I could find the right sort of companion. So far just the right sort of companion has never turned up.”

“It is a good wife you are waiting for, Kenny,” observed Mrs. Jocelyn. “You need a good wife to be your constant companion everywhere.”

“I should not have dared to say it myself,” said Kenny, his blushes hidden by the rich color with which a seafaring life was sure to endow him. “Of course it is a wife I want. I suppose that what makes the real essence of companionship is the feeling that you can’t get rid of it — that it is your fate. I have tried companions of one sort or another. Now, there was Burgess. You know Burgess, Denise, — he has written a novel and a play. He seemed no end of a good fellow, and I got to liking him so well that I asked him to go to England with me.

I wanted to do the British Isles, and of course was to pay all the expenses. I knew he was not rich, that he was not used to extravagant outings, so I supposed he would not add anything in particular to the outlay. But I tell you it cost like fun. It was the London season, and it was, 'Now, my boy, we'll do this,' and 'Now, my boy, we'll do that.' He kept inviting all the literary chaps to dinner, and of course I footed the bills. Now, I really think that up to a certain point I am rather good-hearted, but everything has its limit, and after a while I grew cross. Once I ran out of money and asked him to pay ten shillings for something he had ordered. You should have seen the look he gave me. Well, I bore it as long as we stayed in England, sometimes grinning and sometimes not grinning. I used to wake up in the morning feeling as if I were chained to Burgess and we were fellow slaves together for life. Then I would comfort myself by saying, 'Hang it all, I'm not married to him!' Finally we crossed to Ireland, and once when we were taking a car out somewhere from Dublin I just said to the driver, 'Does n't

it sometimes happen that you whip up your horse so fast as you are going round a corner that a passenger gets thrown off?' I saw a twinkle in the man's eye. He understood. 'Sure, and it very often happens, your honor,' he replied, 'when people is in very great haste.' 'I am in terrible haste to-day,' said I, 'and I'll give you something extra if we get there soon.' 'It is better to hold on tight, your honor,' said the driver, 'lest somebody should get thrown off.' Now, oddly enough, it happened as we went round a corner one of us was thrown off."

"It was not you, Kenny," said Denise.

"No, I held on," said Kenny.

"Was he much hurt?"

"Burgess? I never stopped to inquire," said Kenny. "I knew that he had his return ticket in his pocket and a ten-pound note I had given him that morning."

"You are a funny fellow, Kenny," observed Thomas Campbell.

"If you were half such a funny fellow as I am," said Kenny, "you would die laughing in a week. But I assure you I do not want that sort of companion going round

the world on a yacht; but a nice girl who gets prettier and prettier the more she gets ruffled up by the wind I should not mind having at all."

"You might get tired even of her," suggested Denise, "and I should be afraid she might happen to fall overboard on a dark night."

"Oh, Miss Alden!" ejaculated the Kenny girls in unison.

"I call that unkind," said Kenny. "Don't you see what I long for is just that feeling that I am tied to something and cannot get away no matter how much I want to? I saw a calf once tethered to a bush, and he was going round and round that bush, until he wound himself up so that he could not stir one inch. That's just my idea of happiness. I sometimes get so tired of doing just what comes into my head" —

"Me this unchartered freedom tires;
I feel the weight of chance desires,"

quoted Miss Polly.

"She shall have her own way in everything," pursued Kenny, "except that I shall insist upon her liking to live on a yacht.

I have just one ambition, and that is to go round the world on my own yacht, stopping at all the cannibal islands."

"I think," said Denise, "that if I were your wife I should prefer the falling overboard casually on a dark night to stopping at cannibal islands."

"Oh, Miss Alden, Kenny never meant that, I am sure!" said Faith Kenny.

"Faith knows me. Nothing could induce me to let that tender creature make a feast for cannibals; for after our trip round the world I want her to go to the North Pole with me, perhaps the South Pole as well. In fact, living on a yacht is the only way, — the whole globe belongs to you then," said Kenny.

While Kenny was contributing this feast of reason and flow of soul, it was only the accompaniment to a really excellent luncheon. Everything was delicious. There had been as an appetizer little baby clams, then had come bouillon, followed by lamb chops, sweetbreads, garden peas, a salad, ice-cream, and strawberries. The table was adroitly waited on by the cook's boy, one of the sailors who was a French Canadian, and

Kenny's man Dexter, who was in every point of service a paragon. There was not much room to circulate round the table, but everything was at hand. Apollinaris flowed like water, and at the third course champagne was offered.

"Just one bottle, mother," said Kenny, at Mrs. Jocelyn's glance.

It was miraculous how long that bottle lasted, but then, Miss Polly said, the Apollinaris seemed to suit the champagne so well, and the champagne the Apollinaris, that it soon became no easy matter to tell whether it was champagne or Apollinaris that was sizzling in the glass. Conversation proceeded, and Thomas Campbell threw in a contribution.

"If a man took his wife to sea in a yacht, more likely than not in mid-ocean she would declare that it was positively necessary for her to go on shore and buy something."

"But, Mr. Campbell, how could she expect to go on shore while in mid-ocean?" demanded Miss Honor. "Surely any woman of sense would be reasonable and wait."

"I never knew a woman in my life," said Thomas Campbell, "who could be reason-

able and wait. No woman alive ever sees things except from her own point of view."

"Why should she?" asked Richard Gale.

"Here is my niece," pursued Mr. Campbell, "who will order me to take checks and get them cashed, and when I reach the bank I find she has not endorsed them. She asks me to direct a letter and does not tell me to whom to address it."

"I cultivate these traits," said Denise.

"Do you know the moral of all this, Kenny?" said Miss Polly. "It is that when you are married you must never go to sea with your wife, for you will find out all her weaknesses."

"But that is exactly what I should wish to do," said Kenny.

The strawberries and ice-cream had been extremely delicious, but somehow an air of seriousness now began to come over the company. Here and there a yawn was seen around the table, and a certain air of relief was apparent on Mrs. Jocelyn's saying that coffee should be served on deck. She at once led the way, with the cockatoo perched on her shoulder.

The breeze for which they had been

grateful before luncheon had gone on freshening all the time they were at table, and every inch of canvas was by this time flung to it. The sun, slanting down toward the northwest, now searched the deck, and in spite of the wind the heat and glare made themselves felt. Still it seemed cooler than in the dining-room, and there was a general scramble toward the comfortable reclining chairs. Dexter served coffee, which was invariably taken black. Mrs. Jocelyn had no sooner finished her cup than she applied herself to her knitting with an air of giving her whole mind to "seven stitches plain and seam three times." The wind was certainly rising, and intermittently there came a stronger gust, which made the yacht bury her head in foam. At each movement it was amusing to see Miss Polly, with a gasp, clutch at her chair, for the deck seemed to be losing all idea of keeping to the horizontal. Evidently the Viking spirit was beginning to ooze away. Miss Honor made an attempt to take up her embroidery, but Miss Polly sternly forbade it. "It is safer to lie back in your chair and to talk and laugh," she said. Miss Polly herself was endeavor-

ing to throw her whole soul into conversation. She began by addressing Mrs. Jocelyn. She asked questions, she brought up reminiscences, she told stories, displaying such audacity, such recklessness and high spirits, that Mrs. Jocelyn, feeling unequal to the task of keeping up with her, leaned back, closed her eyes, and simulated slumber. Losing this audience, Miss Polly now turned and addressed Mr. Campbell, who was smoking tranquilly at a little distance, whereupon that gentleman, in no mood for levity, retreated in dudgeon, carrying off his camp chair to the remotest corner of the deck for the rest of the afternoon. The Misses Kenny, used to playing any required part with amiability, now became Miss Polly's admiring auditors. Richard Gale and Denise had gone into total eclipse behind the latter's parasol, which he was holding.

"Come now," said Kenny, addressing Ayliffe, "I want to show you a nice little place in the bow."

Ayliffe rose at once. She had a feeling in these days of answering demands, of accepting conditions, of meeting the situation. "After all, it is the way royal person-

ages do," she said to herself, meeting for a moment Miss Honor's admonishing glance as Kenny took her hand, and in his easy, half-rough, protecting way helped her across the deck, which at times seemed to rise up before her. Certainly there was a little crankiness about the yacht. They were nearing the New Haven light, and expected to pass New London by sunset and wake up anchored off Narragansett. So Kenny assured Aylyffe as he led her to the little nook, where he made her so comfortable with rugs and cushions that it seemed as if it must have been a premeditated arrangement.

It was a premeditated arrangement, — Kenny had instructed Dexter to make a cosy corner. Dexter had understood. Everybody understood by this time, except perhaps the Kenny girls. The offer was to be made on this cruise. The affair had gone far enough, — it was time for the climax. Kenny himself longed to have it all over and settled. He had no doubt of the sincerity of his own passion and the strength of his own determination. There she was, reclining against the cushions he had ordered, looking straight ahead, as if trying

to pierce the future with that soft glance. It was not his intention to confuse her by being too point blank, but at any turn of the talk he was likely to say the word, and the affair would be brought to the desirable termination without his having to endure any of the terrible mental strain that he had heard some men complain of when under stress of having to make a proposal of marriage. All that was necessary, Kenny assured himself, was to have a definite idea of what he wanted to say ; then the current of his feelings would gather irresistible force and carry him along with it. Meanwhile he was leaning against the rail, gazing at her while he smoked his cigar. Of course, he had asked if she objected. She did not object. Nobody had ever objected to Kenny's ways ; and certainly Ayliffe, accepting him, was bound to accept his style, his tone, his virtues, his foibles, his faults, even his vices. Besides, his cigar was expensive, and his smoking was almost the cultivation of the highest taste.

"Lots of women go as far themselves," Kenny was saying ; "some of them do not stop at a cigarette. I suppose it is because

I was brought up by a woman who frowns down anything unwomanly that I don't like a woman who smokes. I do not tell her so. It's rather amusing, sometimes, to see where a woman will stop when she sets out on that road. But I would not marry one of those women," he prattled on, engagingly. "I like a more delicate sort. Perhaps people would not expect me to be particular, but I am very particular. I don't like anything too pronounced. Now, those girls seven feet high who seem to be walking out of Gibson's pictures would never walk into my life."

If Kenny's eyes could have spoken the unutterable things he was trying to utter, if Kenny's heavy face could have gained expression, it would simply have been harder for Ayliffe to bear. All her readiness had suddenly deserted her. At this moment, it may be confessed, she was looking quite charming enough to shine down other women. She had always about her that pure radiance of youth which, once possessed, is perhaps the quality of beauty that stays longest and is the most precious. Her skin, delicate as it was, resisted both sun and wind; and at this moment, with her

lovely, shy eyes and flickering color, Kenny was sufficiently appreciative to have been kept up to the mark, if there had not occurred an unexpected diversion. The wind, until now courted by every yard of sheet and inch of canvas, was suddenly growing too boisterous. A heave-to, a put-about, and a general hauling-in ensued, with its game of puss in the corner as the heavy boom swung into place. Kenny threw himself into the mêlée, shouted orders, even put in a hand himself, and presently came back to his companion in high feather.

“My sailing master has to be taught his place now and then,” he whispered to Ayliffe. “I like to show him I’m no mere amateur.” He went on giving instances of his own wisdom, observation, sagacity, and far-sightedness. Grateful for the change of wind, the sudden tack, and the suggestion of a subject that did not make her sit on thorns, Ayliffe threw herself heart and soul into the mysteries of navigation, feeling that surely here was safety. All roads lead to Rome, however, and the very interested sympathy Ayliffe betrayed in his favorite study threatened to set him off again.

“How you take to it! How you would enjoy a trip round the world!” He gazed at her meditatively, awaiting her answer placidly. “But perhaps you would prefer a steam yacht,” he added.

Ignoring all questions of personal bias, Ayliffe at once wished to know all about steam yachts. Now Kenny was at this time expiating on the Brünhilde the sins he had committed on the Circe, the most elegant little steam yacht afloat, to which for four years he had devoted all his energy and more than all his money. Kindling, he recounted how the Circe had been built for him without regard to expense, the only object being to have the speediest, most beautiful little boat that ever sat on the water. The first season the boilers turned out to be too small, although she was rather nice in other ways. Then she was torn to pieces and fitted with bigger boilers, of course spoiling every arrangement and cutting into the saloon and staterooms. All this might have been borne if the right results had been obtained. The fact was, however, that the second set of boilers turned out to be too big for her. She snorted and trembled and

quivered, and the motion of her screw gave not a few people nervous prostration. Besides, the second set of plates were not bedded properly, being only clamped down, so that as soon as she was a bit shaken by the heavy seas everything was ready for repairs at the nearest port.

“Still, she could go,” said Kenny, “and, after all, that is what one wants in a yacht. And most people, for one reason or another, have a headache at sea, so they might as well have it for the sake of getting through the water well. Now, I honestly like sails best, but while there is nothing one who is really fond of sailing so heartily enjoys as a swaggering good wind that makes a cutter lie over on her scuppers, unfortunately the wind does not always blow. Then there’s the tide, which seems to have been invented to hinder every possible thing you want to do, and how one can hate a boom!”

He had enjoyed the *Circe*, but, oh, how she had cost! Everything had happened, too, that weather, fate, and her own boilers could contrive. Then the coal bunkers! They were always crying out to be filled, like a nest full of young robins. Mr. Campbell

and the other trustees had simply sat down and howled over the money that had to be laid out simply in running the boat, besides the repairs, refittings, and improvements. It was no use for Kenny to say, "Why, what else was the money for? How could it be better spent?" They were actuated by some nonsensical idea that they owed a duty to the estate. There had had to be a compromise, and Kenny was obliged to promise to content himself with sails for three years. Embarked on this story of his grievance, Kenny brought all his powers to bear on the subject, illustrating it with anecdotes and a vigor of metaphor which came little short of eloquence. At least, Richard Gale, coming in search of the girl, said to himself that she seemed to be listening as if enchanted. The sight of her charmingly youthful face upturned to Kenny's smote him.

"He really does interest her," Gale said to himself. He paused, took in the picture in all its details, then shook himself free of his wonder, advanced, and put his hand on her shoulder.

"Miss Grant asked me to come and find

you," he said, in his usual matter-of-fact way. "She begins to feel as if she might be more comfortable in her berth."

Ayliffe was on her feet in a moment. She looked at Gale with a faint, strange smile, that had to him a suggestion of something pitiful about it. Just as she stood up the yacht lurched heavily. Kenny was too late — it was Gale who captured Ayliffe's uncertain hand. He did not release it, but put it on his arm and held it there. Kenny looked after them as they crossed the deck. Gale's quiet, authoritative manner aroused no jealousy. It was evident that he was not saying one word to her. Ayliffe seemed downcast, Kenny thought. Was it that she was anxious about her aunt, or was it because they had been interrupted? Presently, however, he saw her helping Miss Honor down the companionway, and looking back laughingly at Miss Polly, who gave her a look of horror and reproach at the suggestion of a cup of tea. Richard Gale retreated to the taffrail, and as he stood looking aft over the dazzling stretch of their wake, he suddenly felt a light touch on his sleeve.

"I say, Gale," Kenny murmured in his

ear, "your breaking in at that moment made me feel a little like that fellow who lost two thousand dollars at poker and observed plaintively that what really cut him up was the fact that five dollars of the amount was in actual hard cash."

Gale turned round quickly, stared blankly at his host, then comprehended.

"Fools rush in," he said grimly.

"I did not want it to be too sudden, of course," said Kenny. "I think, however, I had just begun to make it plain when" —

"When I spoiled it all," said Gale.

"In five minutes more we should probably have been engaged," said Kenny; "but at any rate nobody can say I have funkcd it."

"A yacht does not seem to be just the place, particularly in the face of a gale."

"Surely you do not call this a gale," said Kenny. "And if it were a gale and a half, a yacht is the best place in the world. It furnishes a thousand excuses, don't you see? Why, the first offer I ever made was at Newport in a cat-boat when a shower came on. There was a pretty girl who said she was afraid, and I held her hand under the mack-

intosh. Rough weather and a mackintosh almost do it for you."

Mr. Gale was prompt. "Do you mean that you actually offered yourself to the young lady on that particular occasion?"

"Of course I did. She seemed to expect it, and how was I to help it?"

"She refused your offer, apparently?"

"Not a bit of it. It was I who thought better of it later, and a lucky escape it was."

"You mean to say that you yourself broke off the engagement?"

"I found she was already engaged to at least one fellow. There's safety in numbers, and it's all useful in the way of experience. A man has to do it two or three times, I suppose, just to understand how simple it is. My mother tells a story of some old bachelor who, after ninety-nine hesitations, advances, retreats, marches, and countermarches, suddenly plucked up a spirit and walked straight up to the lady as if to the mouth of a cannon and shouted, '*Madam, will you have me?*' 'Certainly, sir,' she replied. She, too, had probably been getting up her steam, for," continued the wise Kenny, "women know a thing or two quite as well

as we do, I suppose. Marriage counts to them quite as much as it does to us, and I dare say when they find themselves engaged they are not any more surprised than some of us find ourselves. Not a few of the fellows I have known whose wedding day is fixed chafe at the bit, fret at the harness, and don't altogether like the idea of running double for the rest of their lives. It is the woman in the case who finds it easy, who is always on the lookout, whose imagination takes the gate at just the right moment."

Gale, with his hands in his pockets and his chin on his breast, was gazing at the bubbling, hissing sea of shining green they were rushing through.

Kenny, encouraged by the air of serious attention in his auditor, proceeded.

"Yes, — there is sometimes an awful amount of premeditation in a woman. Did you ever hear about the girl who was going along a mountain road and overtook a man carrying under his left arm two live fowls, over one shoulder a bag of grain, over the other a hoe and spade, while in his right hand he held a tin kettle? The girl fell into conversation with him, and they went on

together pleasantly and sociably until they came to a sort of tunnel where the road ran under the rocks. At the sight the girl drew back with a faint shriek.

“‘What is the matter?’ demanded the man.

“‘It looks so dark and lonely!’ shuddered the girl.

“‘What matter if it is dark and lonely? I’m along and nothing could hurt you,’ said the man. ‘What is there to be afraid of?’

“‘I’m afraid you might kiss me!’ explained the girl.

“‘How could I kiss you?’ said the man with indignation. ‘Even if I wished to kiss you, how could I manage it with two live chickens under one arm, and a kettle in my other hand, and all these things across my shoulders?’

“‘It is as easy as possible,’ replied the girl. ‘All you have to do is to give me the chickens to hold, and set down the kettle and the spade and the hoe, — and the bag of grain would not hinder you the least in the world.’

“Accordingly,” Kenny pursued with a

chuckle, " they entered the tunnel, and the man did give the girl the chickens to hold, and set down his kettle and spade and hoe ; and he did kiss her, finding the bag of grain not the least impediment."

The babbling Kenny was blissfully unconscious of the thoughts that were running through the mind of his guest. Gale had to stifle more than once an inclination to flat mutiny, if not murder. But to pitch overboard the master of the yacht was after all but a temporary expedient. The trouble lay deeper, — in fact, was not in Kenny at all. He might be borne with — steeped as his spirit was in love of self-enjoyment, dwelling there unconscious of the pang of philosophy — but Ayliffe !

XII

NIGHT IS NOT MADE FOR SLUMBER

AYLIFFE meanwhile had put Miss Honor in her berth and was sitting beside her, holding her hand. "I knew all the time that I ought not to come," Miss Honor would murmur in the intervals between climaxes of deeper misery. "I knew all the time I hated the sea, and that for me to pretend to like it was not only absurd, but wicked. Polly says it is the ice-cream, but I am sure the champagne had something to do with it." Another hiatus of poignant remorse. "I told Kenny that life on board a yacht could not be sufficiently serious."

Ayliffe laughed. The situation at the moment seemed quite serious enough. The wind was blowing harder and harder, and from over their heads came the noise of loud orders and hurrying feet. Such a pell-mell of sounds — trampling, stamping, hoarse commands, answering yells of "Ay, ay, sir" —

must mean that they were taking in sail, that before the black, squally look in the southwest the deck was being cleared of all the gay trumpery which had given the yacht such a festive air. Looking out, Ayliffe could see nothing but masses of cloud and gray, tumbling waters. Presently the rain descended in torrents. Everything was battened down, and Miss Polly, who had stayed in the air until the last moment, was also thrown on Ayliffe's hands in a condition of utter collapse. What was going on among the rest of the party was left to her imagination. The heat in the small stateroom was stifling, for with the rain had come a lull in the wind, and all one was conscious of was a hot steam, which seemed both to descend with the rain and to rise from the waters, wrapping them all in its wet blanket, depressing alike to body and spirit. The yacht seemed to be making some headway, but everything a hundred feet away had withdrawn itself into indistinguishable vapors. Signal bells and foghorns sounded out of the mists.

"I suppose that next we shall be run down by one of the Sound steamers," ejac-

ulated Miss Polly, with her usual irrepressible hopefulness.

“Oh, Ayliffe,” sighed Miss Honor, “I want you to promise me something.”

“Very well, Aunt Honor, what is it?”

“I want you to promise me sacredly” —

Miss Polly gave a gasp.

“My dear Aunt Honor, I will promise anything,” said Ayliffe. “You know I will.”

It was quite dark in the cabin, but Miss Honor’s face shone pale and luminous as she lifted it from the pillow.

“I do not think you ought to bind her to a promise,” murmured Miss Polly, — “at any rate, at such a moment.”

“But it is just at such a moment as this that one sees the realities of things, when” —

But Miss Honor was making an effort beyond her powers. It was half an hour later before she could resume, and then, at a moment when Miss Polly was too dejected to utter a syllable, “You said,” she murmured, pressing Ayliffe’s hand, “you said you would promise me sacredly” —

“Yes, dear ; what is it ?”

“I want you to promise me you will not

go round the world on a yacht. I really could not endure the thought of it."

"What in the name of goodness should I go round the world on a yacht for?" demanded Ayliffe, lightly.

Miss Honor groaned. "You are not frank with me, Ayliffe, my own brother's child. To think of you sailing on, day after day, and suffering like this!"

Fido had contrived to wriggle in, very wet and utterly dejected, and Giacomo, bored to extinction by the dead negation which had come upon the yacht, now crept through the porthole to bear them all company.

"Oh, it is like some horrid dream," moaned Polly. "It is like Poe's 'Raven.' It is weird, phantasmal, incredible."

After this, silence settled upon the cabin. Ayliffe lay back on the cushions of her chair and seemed to slumber. Polly, weary and worn, yet with every faculty and sense strained to intense wakefulness, watched the cockatoo perched on the arm of a clothes-pole, his crest taking on strange shapes, his whole aspect growing more and more sinister as daylight withdrew. Dexter stole in with offers of bouillon. Miss Polly whispered

inquiries. Mrs. Jocelyn had retired to her berth, the man said. Mr. Campbell was asleep on the divan in the smoking room. The five young people were now eating supper. Rain was still falling in torrents. They hoped to reach anchorage off New London by midnight.

Four hours later Ayliffe felt a cooler breath. She shook off the magic of lassitude under which she had experienced a nightmare of realities and dreams commingled. Fido had crawled upon her lap ; she drew him closer with a caress, whereupon Giacomo, watchful and jealous, emitted a cry. It did not rouse the others, but it helped to dispel the last remnant of drowsiness which had enchained Ayliffe. She leaned out of the porthole far enough to see the water, and made out the reflection of a star. She longed to breathe the open air, to dismiss the hateful phantasmagoria of dreams that had haunted her in the close cabin. She had only to open the door, cross the saloon ; then if the hatchway were but open she could gain the deck in a moment. Stealing out, she waited, timidly listening, caught sight of a figure stretched on a

reclining chair, and drew back, her heart thumping. It was Kenny. He was asleep, however, — no doubt of that, — and she advanced again, crept past him, and looking up, saw the stars shining through the hatch. She was up the stairs in a moment, and felt the blessed relief of being under the sky. The deck seemed to be empty except for the man at the wheel, who saluted. Presently she made out two figures in the distance, too far away to be distinguished. All she cared for was to be alone with the night, somehow to find herself, to be herself. The storm had passed off. A long, dim line of coast was discernible to the left; on the right the sea stretched in utter silence and loneliness. It had grown cooler, but she liked the first clasp of the chill. Hanging over the stern, she watched the phosphorescence seething up in the wake, which seemed to rush away from the boat with a life of its own. A sort of ghostly splendor and radiance had taken possession of the scene, as if all the light above and below came from the pale illumination of the wide, glimmering mirror.

Ayliffe had not questioned herself of late.

Conscious of her own restless and transitional mood, and of the inquisitive solicitude of all the household, she had simply gone on meeting the exigencies of the moment and putting off the necessity for explanations. But here under the moon and stars, with the white wings of the sails bearing her swiftly onward, her actual consciousness seemed to be as far from the events of the afternoon as if she were a disembodied spirit. What she had then accepted, made her peace with, now appeared incredible, a ludicrous, impossible scheme. Marry Kenny! It was as if she had of late been in a state of downright somnambulism, as if her actual consciousness had no part in it. This assertion of herself, and the right to be herself, now came into conflict with the reckless resolution to which she had lately yielded, making her own conscience its accomplice. Here under the moon and stars her heart, brain, and soul put forth a different claim. Everything false and sordid in her daily life slipped off like a dead weight.

At this moment came an interruption. A voice, very low, but still clear as a bell, vibrated through the night.

"You may trust me, Denise."

Then the answer came, "Trusting too much is not a weakness of mine."

"I do not ask you to trust me too much. I simply ask you to trust me enough, which is — absolutely."

"I felt that the moment my eyes fell on you. Why are you so different from everybody else? It spoils them all for me."

Denise Alden and Richard Gale, pacing the deck, had sauntered toward Ayliffe. Whether or no they saw her she could not tell. Certainly, if feeling like a disembodied ghost, lost in a world to which she did not belong, could dispossess one of shape and substance, she must have been invisible. No, they had not seen her, except as a shadow among shadows. They had turned, were walking away. She crouched lower to the taffrail and waited, intending as soon as a safe moment came to seek refuge in her own berth. A moment before she had rejoiced at being the most insignificant atom in God's universe. Her soul had expanded to its widest limits. What had happened she could hardly have told, but all that had reached forward so triumphantly seemed to

shrink back, cower, suffer an abrupt ending, and turn into vapor, like waves coming against a sea-wall. It was a moment when too many thoughts, feelings, and impulses rushed together. She shivered as with a physical chill.

"Are you warm enough?" a voice asked in her ear.

Ayliffe started to her feet.

"I went down with Miss Alden, and I have brought you up your cloak," said Richard Gale. "Let me help you put it on."

"I must go back to Aunt Honor," she faltered.

"They are all asleep," said Gale. "I listened at the door. I said to myself, 'Why should not Ayliffe and I have a quiet little half hour together under the skies?'"

As he drew the light, warm cape around her, his hands lingered ever so little, with a touch on her shoulders like a caress. All her senses seemed to open at this touch of kindness. She was conscious of a weakness against which she had to assert herself with all her womanly pride. He seemed to detect something in her face, and turned her round to the light.

“You are tired out, excited, overstrung,” he said. “It will do you good to walk up and down a little while. It is not always that I am in a Byronic mood and declare that ‘night is not made for slumber.’ One is so often in bed at midnight, unconscious of the sea and the wind, and the stars in their courses, that we can afford to turn out to-night.”

“Yes,” said Ayliffe. After all, one is subject to the laws of one’s mechanism. For a moment Ayliffe could have wept on Gale’s shoulder, it was so pleasant to feel herself looked after, cared for. What right had Denise to trust him absolutely, just out of instinct? Ayliffe had met his kindness at every turn for years, had tested his patience, his generosity to its last limit. She was jealous of that phrase she had overheard. Why should Denise trust him? Yes, for one moment Ayliffe was shaken with a foolish, childish longing to put out her hands to Gale and say, “Take me, keep me, lead me.” She could not think connectedly, but she felt robbed and despoiled. She realized at this moment how all these years Richard Gale had been hers, imposing his

wishes upon her with the assumption that they must be her law, — hers to disregard, to revolt against, but still hers; she felt that she could not give up her claim. As she hung upon his arm the thrill that passed through her communicated itself to him. He flung his arm round her.

“Are you unhappy, Ayliffe?” he murmured. “Tell me.”

His kindness so drew her, so coerced her, that only pride and self-restraint preserved her from excess of sentiment. He, too, conquered his own impulse.

“Forgive me,” he said. “I ought not to suspect that you could be unhappy, but after all, Ayliffe, I cannot help feeling a little anxiety. You have in a way belonged to me so long, you have been — indeed, you are still to me — just like a helpless little child who holds out her hands, and whom I long to guard.” He paused a moment and then added, “Jocelyn spoke to me. Of course you know he wishes to marry you.”

Ayliffe suffered one moment of rude disenchantment. She could not answer, but her silence seemed to him a full response.

“Of course, you are well aware of his

intentions. Certainly Jocelyn is behaving with absolute openness. I speak to you with entire candor, Ayliffe. I do not think that you have found out your own heart yet. I used to take it for granted that you were in the way of liking Synnott, but I have changed my mind regarding that affair."

"Oh, love is not one of my problems," said Ayliffe, restlessly.

"That is what I believe," said Gale. "I do not think of you as one of the women who trample on their own hearts and marry for money. Still, you are not mere embodied intellect and good sense. You have a great craving for enjoyment, and sooner or later you must feel that vital impulse which puts it in the power of one person, and one person only, to give you supreme happiness."

She listened abashed.

"I want to feel sure that in accepting Jocelyn you will be happy. Of course, you will have all that money can buy, — can do everything that heart could wish in the way of contributing to the ease and pleasure of your dear ones."

She tried to speak, but could not.

"Would that be enough for you?" he now demanded.

"Yes," she answered succinctly.

"Yet all the while love does exist, and is the most tyrannical thing in the world in its demands. On such a night as this, with this sea and this sky, under these lights of heaven, if one loves, one's whole heart goes out in longing. At least, Ayliffe, it is so with a man. What he feels here is an intense desire to have the girl he loves beside him. His heart grows tender, wide as the world; one feeling possesses him. His soul has one cry, "God give her to me!"

It seemed to Ayliffe that this call was to her. It smote upon her every pulse, her every nerve. She had to tell herself that it was Denise to whom he called. She hardly recognized the impulse which made her start away from him, blindly grope three steps, and clutch at the rail. He followed her.

"If you know nothing of all this wild waste of feeling, still it will come. With your trick of idealizing people, I hope you will idealize Jocelyn."

"I do," said Ayliffe, shaken with a fit of trembling.

A sudden change had come over the night. Moon and stars had gradually become blotted out in a luminous mist. Something had happened; shadows lurking in corners suddenly loomed up, grew into tall figures, started forth with outstretched hands. Orders were shouted; in another moment skipper, Kenny, and Mr. Campbell were all on deck. They had reached the coveted harbor and were getting ready to cast anchor. In the confusion Ayliffe stole away unseen, gained the stateroom, and found the aunts, the cockatoo, and Fido all in a condition of lively terror.

XIII

FLAT LOW TIDE

THE yacht lay off New London for the remainder of the night, foghorns and shrill whistles resounding through the thick mist, which by daylight settled down to rain, — a real northeaster, bringing with it a chill caught from icebergs. To have remained on the yacht would have seemed like infatuation with gloom and discomfort, and the entire party except Kenny Jocelyn and Richard Gale took the noon train back to Belport. It was a whole week later before Kenny arrived, with glowing accounts of the way he and Gale had tested the sailing qualities of the Brünhilde. She could behave in more different ways under stress of bad weather, declared Kenny, than any boat he had ever put foot on. At first they had tried to spare her, but had found out that the harder she was driven the better she liked it, and in a fresh storm they had

encountered off Nantucket she had been as stiff as a church. They had rounded Montauk and come back to New York, where Gale had left him to start for the West. Then Kenny had spent two days at Larchmont. Kenny was loud in praise of Gale, — “a quiet man, but with a power of help in him, and, shut up in a cabin with the boat on her beam-ends and everything flying, not bad company.”

The Campbells' house had by this time filled up. All the Coulsons had come, and Valentine Synnott. Mrs. Jocelyn was not slow to point out the fact to her son that he had lost just the right opportunity of pushing his love affair to its conclusion. Kenny would not allow, however, that the break in the chain of continuity counted for anything. He had given orders in New York, and hampers containing beautiful roses and choice fruit addressed to “Miss Grant” were constantly being delivered at the Cameron house. If Ayliffe persisted in the pretense that these offerings were destined for Miss Honor Grant, she did it with so much archness and with such a bubbling up of mirth that Kenny himself liked to

carry on the joke. Of course, he assured his mother, Ayliffe understood. He had said and looked everything except the final word, and that had been almost on his lips when the storm came up. He was ready to go on and face the music, but not, if you please, before Geoffrey Coulson and Valentine Synnott; and nowadays, whether he found Ayliffe on the lawn, in the garden, on the veranda, or in the parlor, one or both of these gentlemen was certain to be with her. Kenny was far from being jealous of either man, and disinterestedly gave himself up to the general scheme of enjoyment. The yacht, having been slightly injured in a collision off Larchmont, was just now laid up for repairs, but Kenny had plenty of other resources at his disposal, and besides horses and carriages, rejoiced in a catboat, in which it was his delight to sail himself up and down and across the Sound, with any one he could find to accompany him. The Kenny girls, particularly Faith, were very fond of the water, and Mrs. Jocelyn was for a time quite delighted at seeing how Kenny devoted himself and his time to giving pleasure to his little cousins. Cer-

tainly, she told Miss Honor, no companionship could have been safer for a young man. Both girls had had just the bringing up which prepared them to find the maximum of excitement in the merest minimum of interest. They waited submissively ; they were wonderstruck at whatever happened ; the least attention was a joyful surprise. Both were pretty ; and in a delicate, refined way they grew upon one, with their fine little features, their eyes that waxed bigger and bigger as they gazed, their smile, too, that took on more and more meaning the longer they went on smiling ; each feature had a charm of its own. Nothing so interesting as Kenny had ever loomed upon their prospect before, and they listened to his every word, fascinated, enthralled. Faith, in particular, was anxious to learn something about managing a boat, and it was very agreeable to Kenny, in the odd hours of the day, when nothing else was doing, to put her through a course of lessons. The rest of the time Kenny was ready to help Denise amuse her houseful of guests. In all these arrangements every one seemed to understand that Kenny and Ayliffe were to be

given the chance of being together ; everybody smiled upon them, with the fullest implication that each was interested in the other. There was an air of offering every opportunity, yet the delicacy of everybody was most exquisite. If Ayliffe felt it, trembled, waited, expected, she yet had a little satisfaction in wrapping herself round with perpetual barriers that shut her off from Kenny, giving at need just the touch that fenced off his least advance.

Although, in these days, Valentine Synnott had banished every symptom of love-making from his manner, he had returned to his old habit of spending a good deal of time with Ayliffe, talking freely, and as his way was, giving her what was uppermost in his mind. He seemed, as usual, to be puzzling out his relations to society.

“ Why am I here ? ” he once demanded. “ What pleasure is there for a poor man like me in accepting hospitalities that I cannot repay ? I am beginning to feel that I must renounce society altogether. It costs too much to keep up with rich acquaintances ! ”

Ayliffe, used to sympathizing with everybody's grievance, was quick to remind him

that unmarried men were everywhere so welcome that they need feel no obligation. But Synnott had embarked on his subject. "The whole business of society means expense," he proceeded. "Just a simple matter of spending a fortnight or three weeks here means more outlay than I ought properly to afford for the whole summer." He shook his head mournfully.

"But surely as a guest in a house" — suggested Ayliffe, mystified.

"Of course it is a great compliment to be invited for a house party," said Synnott, "but as a point of fact it is a cheaper matter to go to a hotel. How many servants are there at the Camerons'?" he went on, his whole look and tone showing such dejection that she hesitated about meeting the obvious question.

"Multiply that number by five and ten dollars," went on Synnott, "and flinging such sums right and left becomes a serious affair."

"Oh, how foolish all that is!" said Ayliffe. "It hurts my sense of thrift and economy to see those spoiled, overfed, and under-worked servants."

"Everybody does it," said Synnott in a hollow voice. "Then with flowers, books, bonbons for the ladies — oh, it does cost!"

Ayliffe could hardly repress a smile. She no longer took Synnott's complaints against the universe too seriously.

He made a gesture toward a great bowl of *gloire de Dijon* roses, and said, "Kenny can do these things. Happy Kenny!"

He waited a moment to see the color rise to Ayliffe's face, and she rewarded him with a lovely flush.

"I used not to understand," he pursued, "but I have puzzled it all out. I used to think that Kenny had altogether too much. Nowadays I do not altogether quarrel with him for being luckier than other men. At times it does seem as if, with all his other possessions, he had no right to have a fresher sense of satisfaction in things than the rest of us. Now, yesterday I happened to be down near the water when he was taking that youngest Miss Kenny out for a sail, and he asked me to accompany them. He was giving the girl a lesson about the different parts of the boat. You should have heard him. She swallowed every absurdity

he uttered whole. He seemed to get no end of fun out of it."

"Kenny is so good-natured," said Ayliffe, "and Faith is a charming little creature — don't you think so?"

"She poses too much as an unsophisticated little creature," said Synnott, "and she seems to me tolerably sophisticated."

"You misjudge her entirely," said Ayliffe warmly. "She is fresh, innocent, and charming."

"I am not so easily charmed," said Synnott, dryly. "I have been obliged to face the inevitable so much of late that I retain only a bare, bleak recognition of the absolute facts of life. What have I left, I ask myself. I have gone through the deluge."

Ayliffe for a moment said nothing, wondering what that deluge was, and what it might or might not have swept away from him. He did not seem to expect an answer, and now proceeded. "What do you predict about Gale and Miss Alden?" he asked in a different voice.

She vibrated to this touch. "I am not quite sure what you mean," she said, troubled.

“ Oh, it is not worth while to treat these matters too delicately. You know Gale better than the rest of us. Do you think he really cares about her ? ”

“ Who could help caring about Denise ? ”

“ That is not an answer that makes for lucidity,” said Synnott. “ To my mind the point of the situation is that she seems to care about him. He is a novelty. She is so mercilessly tired of the rest of us. We are worn-out harps upon which she has played every tune she knows, has tried every chord, every discord, every twang. She does not mind letting us see that she misses him. She quotes him ; she is reading books that he suggested ; he writes to her.”

Something flashed out of Ayliffe’s face.

“ Should you be against it ? ” he demanded, facing her.

“ I ? ” said Ayliffe. “ Fancy your asking me ! ”

“ But I told you last spring,” Synnott began ; then, seeing something in her face, he paused. “ I have no right to ask,” he went on. “ Everything has changed. I am the only person who keeps on in the old way, unless it’s Geoff. Denise began with

him, and I sometimes feel as if, after all her caprices and whims, variations and inconsistencies, she was likely to end with him. Geoff is in love with her, and it is a great help to a man to be actually in love with one particular woman." He had looked at his watch, risen, and now, crossing the room, looked at the flowers again.

"What superb roses he does send you!" he resumed. "It humiliates me — I cannot afford to send flowers."

XIV

BABES IN THE WOOD

IN spite of his reliance on the florist and his delicate postponement of all urgency, the opportunity finally came, and Kenny did not hang fire. In fact, the situation might have been said to have been made for him. He was quick to seize it, and he did his own part to perfection. A great many impediments had been in the way hitherto, but on that particular day Destiny, so Kenny felt, had its eye on both Ayliffe and himself; and abruptly, but eloquently, he finally tackled the question. It all came about in this wise.

About twelve miles back in the country Mr. and Mrs. Campbell and Denise had once come upon a fall of water in the woods, which they had talked about ever since. It was an old mill stream, quiet enough usually, but at that moment flooded by a hard rain. Ever since they had longed for a similar

occasion, that they might take a party to enjoy it. On the 29th of June it so happened that a heavy shower had ended in a whole night's downpour, and accordingly an expedition to the spot was planned at breakfast. The morning was one to rejoice in. It was no effort to drum up recruits: everybody responded to the suggestion. Thomas Campbell was to drive his own horses, and offered two seats to Dr. and Mrs. Binney. Butler Coulson was to manage Kenny's high drag with four horses, and besides the Coulsons there was room for Denise, Valentine Synnott, and the Kenny girls. Mrs. Jocelyn claimed Ayliffe, Miss Honor Grant, and Miss Polly. If Kenny seemed so far left out, it was because he had chosen his own high-spirited rôle, and was to go along with the hampers for the picnic, assisted by the Campbells' butler and his own man, Dexter. It had seemed a little odd that Kenny, usually so gregarious, should on this particular occasion have chosen to be so solitary, yet it is not impossible that there was some design in it. It may as well be confessed that Faith Kenny, with a feeling for his loneliness, had artlessly offered to stay and bear him com-

pany. This Mrs. Jocelyn had peremptorily forbidden. In fact, something in his mother's demeanor on this particular morning had perhaps brought out a flash of solemnity in Kenny. Meanwhile the picnic party, distributed, as usual, like a pack of cards ill shuffled and horribly mismatched, had proceeded on their way between grassy slopes and hills billowy with summer verdure until they reached a spur of high land, whence they could see the hills toward the north rise radiant in opal vapors. It was while they waited here that Kenny overtook them.

"I thought I might be able to catch you up," he cried, and flinging the reins to Dexter he jumped down and approached the carriage.

"Miss Honor," he said, in the tone of a wheedling little boy, "I want to ask a favor."

"What is it?" said Miss Honor, with a look of not acceding too readily.

"May Miss Ayliffe take the short cut to the falls with me? It will be cool and pleasant in the wood," he said.

Mrs. Jocelyn had listened to the suggestion with so much gratification that she did

not wait for Miss Honor, but turning to Ayliffe said, "My dear, do oblige Kenny. He must be so perfectly worn out driving through the hot sun."

Ayliffe looked from one to the other. Miss Honor's lips had emitted a sound expressive probably of dry assent. Kenny was holding the door open, and, as if impelled by some force outside of herself, Ayliffe slowly alighted. So far she had not once looked at Kenny, nor he at her. Now, as they passed into the broad cart-path between the thick rows of beeches and chestnuts, they went on silently, side by side, until they could hear the rumble of the carriage dying away in the distance. Then Kenny, leaning toward her, looked at the face under the wide-brimmed hat.

"I say," he delicately murmured, "is n't this immense?"

He was laughing, and Ayliffe, turning her lovely face toward him, even while she blushed was laughing too.

"Is there actually a short cut?" she now inquired.

"I take it for granted there is," said Kenny.

"At any rate it is a relief to be on foot," she replied.

"I thought perhaps you would not mind," said Kenny, "and by Jove I wanted a little relief. I have been working all the morning to get things ready. I packed the hamper of claret myself."

They were walking straight on into the wood, which, in the full radiance of noon, nowhere looked dark, but was bright with the polished leaves of laurel and the delicate unrolling fronds of fern. Bees were nuzzling in the false raspberry flowers, and here and there in the stillness a bird uttered a note. Kenny, bending low again, saw the delicate profile under that wide hat, also the curve of the cheek and the whiteness of the throat and chin which Ayliffe held high as she looked straight before her.

"Beautiful, is n't it?" said Kenny.

She turned toward him. "Beautiful," she said, and something in her face dazzled him.

"Oh, I say," he murmured, almost hopelessly, "I should like to walk on here forever. Would n't you?"

She turned to him again, laughing, and

again the beauty and brilliance of her face blinded him.

"Are you sure we are going toward the picnic?" she inquired.

"There is just one place I want to go toward with you," Kenny declared. Then, having gone to this length, he lost impetus, but stopping short he took Ayliffe's hands in his. "Look here," he said, "I've got to get this off my mind!"

She was grave now, and kept her eyes, full of fine clearness, fixed upon him. He seemed not to be able to meet that glance. "I say," he pursued, "there is just one place I want to go toward with you, and that is the altar of Belport church, with Dr. Binney behind it in full canonicals."

Ayliffe's whole face now seemed to be challenging him.

"Will you be Mrs. Kenny Jocelyn?" he now said, flinging his hesitation to the winds.

She gave a little sigh, as if still unconvinced. "Are you sure you really wish it, Kenny?" she asked, a little forlornly.

"Really wish it?" cried Kenny. "Of course I wish it, and the Mater wishes it.

Oh, she does so long for you, Ayliffe! She just loves you down to the ground."

They stood hand in hand, like two lost children. Kenny's face twitched with some emotion. He looked at her piteously. "Do promise me," he said softly. "Of course, I know I am not much. I know you do not really care for me."

Ayliffe uttered a little cry. "I do like you, Kenny; I do believe in you," she said. "What I feel is that I do not half deserve your goodness. For before I promise anything there is something I want to say first, that I must say. Then when you hear it, if you do not object, I will promise faithfully to be a good wife. I will try" —

"Oh, you need not try one atom," said Kenny. "You are just the wife I want."

"I want to go to the root of it all," said Ayliffe. "I want to show you that I am just a little sordid."

"Oh, I do not mind that," said Kenny, instantly, in the highest spirits. "I never expected to be married for my beauty alone. How much pin money will content you?"

He laughed. They still stood hand in hand, thus chaffering.

"I want you to understand that I do not want anything for myself," she persisted. "I am clever about my clothes, and I can dress on a very little. I shall really surprise you with the little that I require for my own needs, but then there are the aunts."

"Oh, the aunts!" said Kenny. "Why, bless them, I love them every one! I would simply pour out money like water to make them happy and comfortable."

She gave him a grateful look. There was something so clear, so bright, so sweet about her face that again he was startled with that illumination.

"But there is something else," she murmured.

"Out with it," said Kenny, cheerfully. "More relations? Don't be afraid to confess. But perhaps I had better say at once that the day we are married I am going to give you a lot of money out and out. The Mater and I are agreed on that. It shall be my wedding present."

"Oh, Kenny," she murmured, "how can I thank you?"

He looked intently at her with a solemn, startled face.

“And after I have asked all this you still believe in me?” she asked, pathetically.

“Believe in you? You are the most exquisite thing I know.”

“And you really care about me? Not simply for your mother’s sake, but in your own heart?”

“I’ll bet I do,” said Kenny stoutly. “There is no one with whom I find myself so comfortable and so well off as I do with you, and, what’s more, I always like myself when I am with you, Ayliffe. I do believe that, married to you, I may turn out rather a good fellow. I do want to spare you the least trouble, the least pain. Somehow you always make me feel tender with you. And I love to think that, however I may fall short in some ways, at least you will be well provided for. You do trust me, Ayliffe?”

“Oh, Kenny!” said Ayliffe. She gave a little sob. He looked at her and saw the color suffuse her face and the tears in her eyes run over. “I want fearfully to kiss you,” said Kenny, “but I will wait. I do feel, Ayliffe, that I must try not to take this great good fortune carelessly.”

He lifted first one hand and then the

other, touching his lips reverently to her fingers, then released them. Something in his look and manner was reassuring and comforting to Ayliffe.

“You’ve actually promised?” he demanded.

“Faithfully and truly,” said Ayliffe. She felt for the moment transported to a realm strangely unreal, strangely different. As they stood silent the sound of the waterfall began to make itself heard above the murmur of the woods.

“There they are,” said Kenny. “Now that we are really engaged, we will go on.” In fact, they renewed their walk in very good spirits.

Presently shouts began to be heard from every direction. It was evident that scouts were being sent out. Perhaps there had been a flicker of impatience; perhaps everybody was hungry for luncheon; perhaps everybody found something suggestive and portentous in Kenny’s bringing Ayliffe up by the short cut; perhaps they began to believe that the two babes in the wood might be going on hand in hand, wandering up and down under the trees forever; but,

at any rate, almost every member of the party had by this time come out to meet them, and everybody laughed when the two advanced trying to look as if it were nothing in particular. Kenny recounted the most surprising adventures in his most whimsical manner, and threw his personal influence into the preparations for luncheon. Ayliffe sat down by the cascade, now swollen by the torrents, coming down with a rush and a roar to vanish into a chasm dark as night. She took off her hat, felt the welcome spray on her hot cheeks, and a sunbeam slipping through the trees lighted her up with its glory.

XV

A MASTER OF PERSUASION

THE engagement was announced next day, and of course congratulations came flying in.

"What, promise to obey Kenny?" said Denise.

"Why not?" replied Ayliffe. "I am always obeying something, as often as not something which seems a blind, unreasonable force. Kenny is delightfully reasonable, — why not obey Kenny?"

"And love him?" demanded Denise.

"Oh, certainly love him," replied Ayliffe. "It certainly ought to be easy to love Kenny, he is so good."

"Oh, I know," said Denise. "I always felt it was letting a great opportunity go not to marry him myself. How everything does seem to come to you!" she added admiringly.

Ayliffe gave a little gasp. "To me?" she said.

"Of course to you. I know of no one

who, all around and down deep, gets out of life more than you do."

"It has always seemed to me," Ayliffe went on, rounding out her unfinished sentence, "that what I have had to live on contentedly was the shreds and patches of things."

"You!" ejaculated Denise. "You have everything. There is no trying to compete with you. And now you will be a huge success, — you will have power to make life anything you wish."

Whatever Ayliffe possessed was certain to shine in the most desirable light to Denise; that had to be expected. Ayliffe was already finding the path of the newly betrothed a little difficult, a little weary. The four aunts had always held her to consistency, and she had not been consistent. She felt that in every glance they accused her of trying to serve two masters, of acknowledging a higher and a lower law. Kenny himself had told the aunts the night before of the engagement, and had carried her through the first ordeal quite bravely. At the moment he had given nobody else time to say a word, but when she had gone up-

stairs and sat before her glass, brushing her hair, one of the aunts after the other had come in. Mrs. Cameron and Mrs. Ritter had kissed her and cried over her. Miss Honor had been a little grim, but full of feeling. It was Miss Polly who shook her head, who stood back, who held off, with a suggestion which tantalized, with an air of having something on her mind, of holding something in reserve. She did finally say, "You are sure that he does think so awfully much of you that you need have no fears?"

There was an odd eagerness in her manner which surprised Ayliffe.

"But why else should he marry me?" said the girl, quite gently and simply.

"Well, I confess I do not quite see why you take him. We are all a little surprised at you, Ayliffe," said Miss Polly. In fact, Ayliffe got no comfort out of Miss Polly. When the last sounds had died away, when everything was silent, Ayliffe rose from her bed, and sat for an hour looking at the moonlight that hung over the world like a shining mist. She could smell the roses and honeysuckles, and along with wafts of odor came breaths of refreshing coolness from

the trees. She hardly knew what regrets, what repentances were in her mind, and was chiefly conscious of a clash of chords in her heart all vibrating together. Her pulses beat as if she were in a fever. When she did finally go back to bed she lay with her head resting on her arm, gazing into the darkness and thinking. She slept a little after the day came, and afterward rose with a feeling of refreshment, which was good fortune, for she had no little to face. Indeed, it seemed to her to-day that even Fido and Colette and Colotte gazed at her expectant and wondering, and Giacomo had flown over before breakfast, as everybody said, like a carrier-pigeon from Kenny. The cockatoo, however, was in his most cynical mood, and all the time they were at table perched on one leg on top of the screen, with one eye shut, uttering at times odd little shrieks.

Curiously enough, when the mail came it brought Ayliffe a surprise. This was a letter from the publisher to whom she had, two months before, confided her novel, telling her that they found in her story no little freshness and vigor, and making a proposal

to print it first as a serial in one of their periodicals. They even named the sum they would pay down, which seemed to Ayliffe considerable. How delightful, how inspiring this event would have been in the old life from which she felt now utterly detached! After reading the letter she sat motionless, sunk in thought, her arms hanging down. "How oddly things come about," she said to herself. Later in the day, when Valentine Synnott came, she showed him the letter, and reading it he rubbed his eyes, stared, and exclaimed, "Why, evidently you had it in you!" then added, "The flowing tide is with you now; who has everything gets everything."

Mrs. Jocelyn and the Kenny girls had very naturally been Ayliffe's first visitors. The elder woman was so frankly happy over the thought that Kenny had really won Ayliffe that the girl felt herself swayed, almost carried off her feet.

"I have hardly dared speak," Mrs. Jocelyn went on. "Even to-day I half fear it is a happy dream, and that if I raise my finger I shall break the spell. I am so perfectly contented, Ayliffe, with the thought of

having you! I like to sit down and shut my eyes, and take it all in. I do love you, dear, so much. Oh, you don't know how happy we are going to make you. Of course, a girl shrinks at first from marriage, but the charm of married life will come. Little by little one takes it in, and it grows and grows. I know that Kenny has got it in him to make you happy. I do feel that you will have much that is sweetest in life. Indeed, Ayliffe, I am ready to promise it."

Ayliffe had really to meet all this love, all this belief in herself. Hitherto she could elude, evade, try not to face it. It was not enough to-day to maintain a spellbound stillness.

"And I want it to be over," Mrs. Jocelyn went on. "It cannot be soon enough to suit me. And Kenny feels the same way," she added. "Indeed, he said to me just now" —

But at this Ayliffe jumped up with a feeling of protest. So far Mrs. Jocelyn had had it all her own way. Ruth and Faith had simply sat and looked on; but Ayliffe could bear their eyes no more, finding in each of the sweet little faces a certain prim disap-

probation. So far she had had no chance to utter a word to either girl; now as she went up to them, feeling a little jarred by the air of distance which they had interposed, she was struck by a certain sadness about Faith. Mrs. Jocelyn was quick to explain this.

"The girls have come to bid you good-by," she said. "Their mother has sent for them. They are a little out of spirits at being called home just as the pleasant times begin."

Again Aylyffe had the feeling that their disapprobation of her fairly glared out of their eyes, and in Faith in particular there was an air of suppressed intensity.

"Oh, I am so sorry!" said Aylyffe, eager to be everything she could to Kenny's cousins; "but I hope you will not have to go away for a long time yet."

Ruth murmured something about Friday, the day after to-morrow, but Faith uttered not a word. Evidently it was hard to be torn away from the delights of Belport.

Kenny had followed his mother, and accordingly Mrs. Jocelyn called her nieces, and they went away, leaving the lovers together.

Ayliffe said something to him of Faith and Ruth being called home. Might not their mother be persuaded to leave them with their aunt for another month? Kenny made a slight grimace. It was even visible that he was a little amused by the suggestion. It almost seemed as if he had something which he wished to confide to Ayliffe; but what he said was, "Oh, it's imperative, — it's awfully imperative. In fact," he went on, "I believe there is some talk about their having a trip to Europe."

If there was any vagueness about his cousins' plans, Kenny was eager to have the fullest light upon his own. Yesterday he had believed he was perfectly happy in being engaged; to-day being engaged was not enough. He wished to be married on the instant, or, if not on the instant, as soon as possible. He seemed to expect to see this impatience flash back at him from Ayliffe's eyes, and was very much disappointed that she hesitated.

"But you promised to marry me, you know," he said.

"But that was only yesterday. One has to get used to an idea."

"Used to an idea? I assure you I am used to it. Of course, it will be awfully nice coming here to see you every day, and perhaps staying all day, — that is, for a time! But say by the middle of July?"

Ayliffe shook her head.

"The first of August, then, and we can have the yacht at Bar Harbor?"

Ayliffe turned the matter over in her mind. Of course, Kenny had his little requirements.

"Oh, you will like to go to Bar Harbor," she said, "and I must not expect you to stay here."

It was clear that Kenny was infinitely struck with her disinterestedness, but more than ever he warmed to the work of carrying his point.

"Now, Ayliffe, you know you have taken me," he pleaded, "and you know you have got to see me through. You say you like me, and here I am. You must just keep me on my knees. You don't begin to know how necessary you are to me. Without you, actually, I do not feel safe. You cannot realize how happy and how proud I shall be when I go about with you. I want to say

to all the world, 'Look at her; let her speak for me. She believed in me enough to take me.' But then, you see, having taken me, you have got to have me on your mind, almost on your conscience. I am not made of iron or marble. I am not equal to standing up on a pillar like — what is his name — St. Simeon? I give in to things and to people that I do not care a twopenny rap for. I am dragged this way and that, as if instead of being a free man I were tied to wild horses, like that other fellow — what was his name? I do really need you to look after me, Ayliffe. Why not be a good girl and give in? Have you any other plans for the summer yourself?"

There had been a tone in Kenny's entreaties that stirred all kinds of compunctions and remorse in Ayliffe.

"You know that really, after having said all that yesterday in the wood, we are together," he went on, with an eye to the lovely flush and also the rising tears that his words had brought. "Don't you think we might as well keep together? Of course, I realize you do not feel proud about it all, as I do."

Her smile, if shy, was full of sweetness.

"I ought to feel proud. I know at any rate that I am intensely grateful for what you said yesterday."

"Well, if we are both suited all round?" He put out his hand, and after a moment's hesitation Ayliffe put hers into it. "Well, you won't leave me alone?" he said.

She faltered. "Oh, I don't know how to say it."

"You need not say one word," said Kenny. "I'll do all the talking."

XVI

AYLIFFE CAN PAY HER DEBTS

RICHARD GALE must have reached Belport on that Wednesday evening, for this was Thursday morning, and now before breakfast he had appeared at the Cameron house, had asked for Ayliffe, and here the two were closeted in the library. The aunts supposed he had come to offer his congratulations, but apparently he had no thought about the engagement. Something quite different was on his mind, and when Ayliffe came down in a loose embroidered white frock he stared at her for a moment, perhaps a little concerned at her pallor and the dark lines encircling her eyes, which added curiously to their brilliancy. But after a greeting he took her by the hand, led her to a chair, and went straight to the point.

“I have sold those shares of the Eureka for more than sixty thousand dollars,” he said, evidently a little excited. “I told you

nothing about it, because I did not dare breathe until it was done. I heard in May that a new vein had been opened and that something was going on, and part of the reason that I consented to go West was that I wanted to be on the spot. I struck it just as the boom came. I had not believed in it before. Indeed, I had not taken the certificates with me. I came straight back, only reaching New York yesterday. I was just in time to go to Wall Street, and, as I say, I got sixty-one, which gives you \$65,791.00."

The whole man was aglow. He stopped short and gazed at her exultantly. "Perhaps I have made a mistake not to wait," he went on. "If they go up to ninety I give you leave to find fault with me, but when for years and years they have stuck at eight and nine asked and only five offered, sixty-one seemed to me simply a bonanza. I am so glad about it, Ayliffe! On my soul, I did not suppose that anything concerning money could put me into such a fever of joy and of impatience. For, don't you see, I had to cross the continent. Suppose I were to lose the market, suppose the new

lode were to turn out only a surface pocket. However, all the news I met was reassuring. All the while the lode was widening and deepening; the further the shaft goes the better it has turned out. As I say, Ayliffe, I may have been premature, but I wanted you to realize something on at least one of your father's investments."

So far he had been only eager to communicate his news. He had seen her eyes fixed on him, and had expected to see her whole being vibrate to this good fortune. Now, experiencing a lack of response, he paused and stared at her.

"You do not look glad," he said, in a different tone.

"Oh, I am glad," she replied, in a mechanical sort of way. "I am glad, very glad." But the clear sincerity of his whole mood found no answer in her. What was in her mind he could only ponder. Her lips trembled slightly, — she looked away from him. He took her hand, and although she left her slender fingers in his, he did not seem to reach her.

"You are not glad at all," he said, as if dumbfounded.

“ Oh, yes, I am glad, I am thankful,” she faltered. She had turned her glance away from him. Her lips moved, and he could hear a faint murmur. He stooped lower, put his ear to her lips. What she was murmuring was, “ I always said that I must pay that debt to you, and now it turns out that after all it might have been paid — it might have been honestly paid.”

He did not wait to have her complete the sentence. His whole face had darkened ; he drew back.

“ How you must dislike me, Ayliffe ! Oh, my God, how you must despise me ! Have I deserved it ? ”

He had met a grave, pitiful little smile on her face. He could not guess what she was thinking, how she was saying to herself, “ Had I only known that this was coming ! Now it is too late, too late.”

She could not bear it. She bowed her head down to her knees. She knew that honor, dignity, and even decency required that she should control this mental anguish ; that she should answer Gale ; that she should never let anybody on earth know how this intolerable pang assailed her, that

she had made the sacrifice of all she held dear, and that it was needless.

He stood waiting, his own feeling of disappointment and rebuff becoming lost in a widening consciousness that it was she who suffered, that she was struggling in some deep waters of feeling. He began to murmur, "Ayliffe, Ayliffe." He put his hand on her shoulder, then threw his arm around her and drew her close.

"What is it, dear child? Tell me — you frighten me."

She gently drew back and looked up with a little soft smile of obedience, and said, with a little sigh, "It is so strange, so strange, I cannot take it in."

"About this money?"

She nodded.

"A little while ago I felt so poor! Everything seemed to go against me. Yesterday I got word that the story I had sent away was to bring me hundreds and hundreds of dollars, and now this news comes."

The obvious note of her being no longer poor struck his logical sense.

"Have you accepted Jocelyn?" he demanded.

She smiled, although his look and tone gave evidence of the sharp tension of his mood.

“Yes, I am engaged to Kenny.”

“Since when?”

“Since day before yesterday.”

“Is it absolute, irrevocable?”

“It is absolute, irrevocable.”

Some form of exclamation burst from Gale. He walked away from Ayliffe to the window and seemed to be looking out. It was screened with wire, but otherwise open to the light and air, and the dewy splendor of the lawn, all set off with masses of roses in full bloom, lay before him. Fido, the angoras, and the cockatoo were having a little game of romps along the paths. He stood there silent, and the utter stillness stupefied Ayliffe, then startled her, and finally brought her to her feet. She ran across the room and laid her hand on his arm. He turned.

“Well,” he said, “I am simply trying to take it in that you are engaged to Jocelyn. Once, somehow, I used to feel that you were mine; now you are not mine.” He faced her, his manner quite simple and kind.

“Although I had seen it coming, I had never believed it,” he went on. “Would it be fair, Aylyffe, if I were to ask you if you love him?”

She felt his searching eyes and rebelled against their power.

“Yes, I can love Kenny,” she said.

“And he will be able to make you happy?”

“I expect to be very happy,” she again replied, in the same strange tone.

“God knows,” said Gale, with feeling, “that if you marry the man you love and are happy I have no right to utter a word. Your peace is dearer to me than anything in the world. There is no doubt about Jocelyn’s money, and he will be generous.”

“He is the most generous person on earth,” she burst out, then, with a devouring blush, added, “except you, Mr. Gale.”

His look back at her was like a blow. She had actually to shut her eyes—her whole being tingled.

“Have you tested his generosity already?” he asked, dryly.

She waited a moment, doubtful whether or not to confess all that was so utterly

sordid about the story. Then, with a feeling that she owed it to Kenny to put him in the best possible light, she said, —

“Unless I had spoken to him about money I could not have realized just how good he is.”

“You spoke to him about money?”

She flung back her head.

“I haggled,” she said indomitably.

“Haggled! Do you mean you put a price upon yourself?”

She was quivering from head to foot, but tried to answer undauntedly, —

“Not just that, but I told him that I should want to do something for the aunts, and then ” —

“Go on. Tell me you told him that you owed me something which had to be paid, or you could not ” —

“I did not need to say anything,” said Ayliffe gently. “At the faintest suggestion on my part of anything about money he said that his wedding present to me would be a large sum.”

The two continued to face each other for a moment in silence. Then came a tap at the door, and Miss Polly looked in. Break-

fast was ready and waiting, and Mr. Gale must come and join them. Mr. Gale declined breakfast,—he had other business on hand.

“I simply came to tell Ayliffe that her financial affairs were looking up,” he explained to Miss Polly.

He nodded to Ayliffe. “I will try to see you in a day or two,” he observed, and then was off.

He had for the moment no plan except to get away from the house. He felt sick and sore, and as if a door had been shut in his face. The knowledge that Ayliffe had really engaged herself to Kenny had struck him a blow. He had so long been used to the feeling that his love for the girl must be equaled by his magnanimity, but that his determination would sooner or later win her, that he felt at this moment as if he had lost, not part of his life, but his whole life,—as if everything had come to an end. Once in the open street, he was undecided what to do. The first thing was to get out of Belport, to take the next train to New York. He looked at his watch. It was too late for the eight-fifteen, but the nine-thirty was not

far off. His way led past the Campbell house, but he had no desire to turn to Denise for consolation to-day. Denise would have read him through and through in a moment. With all his admiration for Denise, her whole nature expressed for him too much unrest, too many demands. The difference between Ayliffe and Denise was that Ayliffe was absolutely a woman who charmed, drew, and held, and the other a clever creature, all whims, who amused, surprised, delighted, but who individually remained vague, shadowy, problematical. She interested him intellectually, but at the same time never touched his heart or sense. No, he did not wish to see Denise to-day. He would go back to New York, where there was business, business of the most urgent nature, thank heaven! As he turned he heard his name called. It was Kenny Jocelyn.

"I heard you were here," said Kenny. "Was there ever such a piece of good luck? I have missed you every moment since we parted, Gale, and needed you every hour! I am so glad to see you!"

Gale, although conscious of being cold and repellant, could still answer the warm

hand-shake, for to look at Kenny's glowing face and laughing eyes without smiling back would have been impossible.

"You have been there?" said Kenny, pointing over his shoulder to the Cameron house.

Gale nodded.

"You have heard all about the engagement, then?" Kenny pursued.

"Well, yes. I suppose congratulations are in order. I can truly tell you that I consider you one of the most fortunate men in the world."

"Of course, I know all that, and I quite agree with you that I do not deserve it," said Kenny, "but if you knew what I feel at this moment! Where are you going, by the way?"

"Back to my room and then to New York on the nine-thirty express."

"I will just walk along with you," said Kenny. "Perhaps it will put me in a better state of mind. Oh, how nice it sounds! Off to New York at nine-thirty! No trouble, no Maters to scold, no trustees to grumble, no sweetheart to cast black looks at you! I envy you with all my heart."

They were walking on together. Gale turned sharply on Kenny.

"Look here, youngster," said he. "If you know what you are talking about" —

"Oh, thunder!"

"If you cannot take a better tone, I will" —

"Don't you see, Gale, I am in a confounded fix?" said Kenny. "And I just want to put the whole matter before you."

The house where Gale stayed was not far off. He led the way, ushered Kenny in, shut the door upon the world, then after a few moments' silence opened the conversation.

"Let me say this, Jocelyn," he began. "I have been told this morning that Miss Grant has done you the honor to accept you. I am Miss Grant's guardian, and I tell you squarely that I do not find you quite in the mood I should expect."

Kenny had sat down in an easy-chair by the window and was rocking vigorously.

"So far as Miss Grant is concerned," he said, "everything is all right. I admire nobody in the world half so much. I am ready to jump out of my skin whenever I think of

her. I only wish that she and I were alone in the world."

Gale waited.

"The trouble is that I am in a confounded fix," proceeded Kenny, "and I put Miss Grant quite out of the question when I say, 'Hang women!'"

"I understand," said Gale, with intense indignation. "You have other obligations."

Kenny uttered a groan.

"That is what I wanted to tell you. Just fancy! It is my cousin Faith who insists that I am engaged to her, who says I offered myself to her. She declares she will tell everybody so. She has already told the Mater, and the Mater is terribly disturbed."

"But is it true?" demanded Gale, in a deep voice.

"It is the most nonsensical idea in the world," said Kenny. "I should no more have thought of trying seriously to go to work to marry Faith than—why, I just accepted her as good fun, you know, and cousins are cousins. I liked to make her open her eyes. She was easily scared, too, and perhaps I put my arm around her, and

if any one has gone as far as that, why, kissing comes easily. You understand, Gale, that I was just practicing, as it were. There was nothing in it."

"Yet you cannot deny that you have spoken to her of marriage?"

"If I have, it was only in fun, I tell you. She knew well enough it was only in fun."

"Miss Grant is of age," said Mr. Gale, "but my guardianship may be said to continue. Certainly my duty toward her, my feeling for her, is as strong as ever. I would not permit you or any man on earth to put her in a doubtful position."

"I put her in a doubtful position! I would die first," said Kenny. "The Mater feels it quite as strongly. Faith's father has been sent for. He will be here this afternoon. They will all leave early to-morrow — in fact, the Mater lays it all to Faith and is indignant. But, just to make up for the mistake of letting her stay on here in this dangerous vicinity, she is willing to give both girls a trip to Europe."

Gale stared straight at Kenny.

"Why are you telling me about it all? Because I am Miss Grant's guardian?"

"Because you are out and out the best fellow I know," said Kenny. "I feel downcast — I hate myself. Why am I forever in some mess? I long for a little sympathy."

"I am sure I have got no sympathy for you. What do you want? What idea is behind all this? Have you no feeling? Good heavens! Are you like an ass between two bundles of hay?"

"Oh, it is Ayliffe I want, no doubt of that," said Kenny, cheerfully. "The Mater cannot live without her."

"If I thought by any possible chance there was anything different lurking in your mind, by the living God, I would break the whole thing off," said Gale, severely. "A man in love knows when he is in love."

"Of course he does," Kenny declared. "The trouble is there are too many girls. A fellow feels sympathy for them, and he gets in a fix. There are really not men enough to go round."

"Love? You know nothing about love," Gale pursued, at a white heat. "Love has no alternative. Nothing can be more convincing than its revelation, nothing more imperious than its dogma, nothing more

infallible than its demands upon a man's heart and conscience. It is the one true religion — there is no other.”

While Gale spoke he had been thrusting his things into his bag. His time was up. He shook hands with Kenny, who was still rocking vigorously by the window, and was off without further parley.

XVII

KENNY HIMSELF AGAIN

THE day had been one of extreme beauty, but between four and five o'clock that afternoon a severe shower came up. After his talk with Gale, Kenny had spent the morning at the Cameron house and taken lunch with Ayliffe and the aunts, then had taken leave, saying that he had promised to give Ruth and Faith a last sail. The shower did not clear away. At sunset there was for one moment a single gleam of crimson fire that was presently lost in the black desolation. Whether or not the sailing party had gone out in face of the storm, Kenny was too good a sailor for Ayliffe to feel any alarm. The evening had turned out so wet she felt no surprise that he did not come in. She had nestled upon the sofa beneath the tall lamp, pretending to read, — Colette on one side and Colotte on the other, each lying stretched to its white,

fluffy length, and both purring soft contentment. Fido was in her lap. The next morning the rain still descended in a soft, silent, imperceptible drizzle ; white vapors hid the tops of the trees, hid even the brightest flowers that were six yards away. The turf was sodden, the air a wet blanket, and everything and everybody felt its influence. The cockatoo came over, a mere dingy lump of bedraggled feathers. He heralded no other arrival. There was a general sensation that the world had come to an end. All the excitement attending the engagement, — all the ideas, sensations, conjectures concerning it, — seemed to have dropped utterly out of everybody's thought. Ayliffe stayed chiefly in her own room. The aunts wandered about restlessly, vexing each other with attempts at conversation. Just past noon a voice was heard from the grocer's cart behind the shrubbery putting questions to Calvin, as to whether anything had been heard about the fate of Kenny Jocelyn's sailboat. Calvin did not catch the idea, but Ayliffe had heard, and Miss Polly had heard, and instantly everybody understood the speech-

less load of dread that had oppressed them all the morning. In fact, all night each one of the aunts had felt the most painful presentiments of something about to happen. But before these various forebodings had taken shape a note from Mrs. Jocelyn was handed to Ayliffe. It ran thus : —

“MY DEAREST AYLIFFE, — You may have heard that we have been in a terrible state of alarm all night about my son Kenny and my niece Faith, who went out sailing yesterday about three o’clock and did not get back. I write to tell you that I have this moment received a telegram from Kenny saying that they were blown across the Sound, but reached Port Jefferson and are entirely safe. What I have felt, and what I am still feeling, I will not try to describe. I am so utterly worn out that I shall not ask you to come over, but I am ever yours, with dear love,

SARA KENNY JOCELYN.”

Ayliffe read the note three times over before she answered it, with a singular consciousness of the unreality of her own feel-

ing. The sun broke through the clouds presently, and the afternoon turned out beautiful, the heat tempered by a pleasant breeze. The great white clouds swam off to pile up in the northeast, where they shone resplendent, leaving the rest of the heavens a blue void. The carriage came round as usual at three o'clock, and three of the aunts set off for their drive. Miss Honor would not leave Ayliffe. Ayliffe sat down on the veranda as if to watch, for what she knew not. She had a singular feeling of aloofness from the world, of being left out. She saw Thomas Campbell pass, and then Dr. Binney. Each bowed to her with an air of peculiar gravity. Denise and Geoffrey Coulson, on horseback, drew up at the gate to say that they were going to the lighthouse. Each asked how Ayliffe was, but neither alluded to Kenny. More and more it was borne in upon Ayliffe that some mystery was behind it all. Valentine Synnott had gone back to town that morning, Denise said, and had left his adieux. The party at "The Cottage" had all sat yawning at each other the night before, and he felt it could no longer be borne.

"This is one of the days when everything in the world seems to have come to an end," said Denise, as they rode away.

Something had happened, something had come to an end,—that was clear. Miss Honor felt it. At the least sound she sat up and stared, as if at a ghost. Colette, Colotte, and Fido all seemed watching for something. Ayliffe's mind reached out for some clear idea on which to fasten. Shaping itself little by little out of her consciousness came the belief that somehow the resolution she had taken to marry Kenny was to be tested. Perhaps some occasion had arisen for actual sacrifice. Perhaps Kenny was no longer rich. Perhaps, instead of having everything to her advantage, she, Ayliffe, was to have it in her power to do everything for Mrs. Jocelyn and Kenny. She braced herself to meet some possible need of heroism. No impossible tantalizing vision of any other happiness must tempt her.

"Whatever happens now," she said to herself, "I must be true to Kenny. I must be true to something."

Miss Honor, after making sundry ejacu-

lations, like "It is certainly the most extraordinary circumstance!" or "I cannot begin to predict what has happened," and then again, "I suppose time will determine," finally fixed her glance on Ayliffe.

"I hope, dear, you will brace up and be ready for some bad news," she said.

"About Kenny?" replied Ayliffe.

"I do not say what," said Miss Honor. "I only know that sometimes one has to take one's courage in one's own hands and be ready for the very worst that can happen."

"Certainly Kenny was not drowned. He was able to telegraph to his mother," said Ayliffe.

"No, he was not drowned."

"Nor Faith?"

"No, certainly not Faith," said Miss Honor, grimly, with the obvious suggestion of its being more the pity.

Ayliffe had sprung up. She was not listening.

"Why, there is Mr. Gale coming up the hill," she said. "Now we shall be able to find out something."

She ran down to the gate to meet him,

and Gale saw her standing there looking, in the white summer frock with blue ribbons that she wore, almost like the child he had seen her first.

"Were you waiting for me?" he demanded.

His face looked stormy. It was clear that something had disturbed him very much.

"Waiting for something to happen," she replied. "Never in all my experience have I known anything like to-day."

"I can readily believe it," Gale answered, "for never in your life have you had the experience of to-day. Ayliffe, try to be strong. I have some bad news for you."

He took her by one hand and Miss Honor by the other, and led them in.

"Kenny Jocelyn was married to his cousin Faith at ten o'clock this morning," he said.

Ayliffe said nothing. All that she did was to raise her hands and press them against her forehead. It was Miss Honor who exclaimed, —

"Polly said so. Polly declared all the time that there was something going on

between them. She had seen them herself, she had heard of them by land and water."

Meanwhile, Gale had led Ayliffe to a seat. A vivid color had risen to her cheeks. As her aunt spoke she looked at her with wide-open eyes, eyes that seemed to burn.

"Do Kenny justice, Miss Honor," said Gale, with authority. "His conduct, I will admit, seems black as night, but after hearing what he had to say to-day I acquit him of having intended any real perfidy. They came, he and his bride" — Miss Honor uttered a little shriek — "to my office just before noon and told me all about it," Gale replied. "She had asked him to take her for one more sail" —

"When Kenny left us yesterday afternoon he told us that both Ruth and Faith were going," said Miss Honor.

"Ruth had a headache, or was afraid of the weather," Gale proceeded. "She might well have been afraid, — for the shower was already looming up in the west. Kenny confesses that it was foolish to risk it, but he believed the storm would hold off. When it reached them they had gone out so far that they could not get back. He

was not quick enough in taking in sail, and he had to cut everything away. Nothing else saved him. As it was, they were almost swamped. Of course, they were drenched through and through. When the day broke they were only two miles from Long Island. Kenny used his oars, and they got in before seven o'clock. Of course, he must have felt for the girl."

Ayliffe had been following his every word with the most intense interest.

"I am sure Kenny felt for her," she said, in a voice at first wavering, then strengthening in decision.

What Miss Honor, with her head on one side, said, was, "I believe it was all Faith's fault. She wanted it to happen."

Gale, with knitted brows, went on with his story. "What Faith said was that she would never go back, that she would rather drown herself than go back and face Mrs. Jocelyn. It did seem awkward, Kenny confessed himself, and as it was he who had made the mess of things, it was, perhaps, as well that he should clear it all up. He is ashamed of his own part in the affair; I can assure you of that, Ayliffe. Concerning

you, he says all that could be wished. It was beautiful, what he said of you."

Ayliffe looked up.

"I believe in Kenny," she affirmed, as if asserting something in the face of irony.

"I always did say," said Miss Honor, "that Kenny was made so and could not help it. This was not Kenny's cleverness — it was beyond him. It has been somebody else's cleverness. We all know very well who that somebody is."

Miss Honor was, however, having her say all to herself. Gale had gone up to Ayliffe, had taken her hand, and, finding it cold as ice, had clasped it in both of his. All the light and color had left her face.

"I want to go over and see Mrs. Jocelyn," she said, after a few moments' pause. "It was all a good deal Mrs. Jocelyn's doing," she explained, with a pitiful little smile.

"Kenny himself said that you would look out for his mother, that he was sure of you," said Gale.

Ayliffe had risen. For a moment she could not command her strength. She tottered, and would have fallen if Gale had

not reached out his arms and supported her. In fact, he drew her close to him and her head rested on his shoulder.

"Oh, Ayliffe," he said, "I would have spared you this if I could. All the woes of your life seem to come to you through me. No wonder you hate me."

If it did not seem hate exactly that the touch of Ayliffe's head on his shoulder meant, he drew from it only an acknowledgment of her pain and of her need of his support. Presently she stirred, opened her eyes, and looked up, saying again that she must go to Mrs. Jocelyn. The pony carriage had come back and was waiting at the door. Ayliffe slipped into it and was driven to the Kenny house, and without ringing stole in through the open French window, passing Ruth Kenny sitting there, who covered her face with her hands. She found Mrs. Jocelyn alone, disconsolate, pale and wet-eyed. Ayliffe knelt down beside her and buried her face in her lap, and with very different thoughts in their minds both women sobbed together in one passion of uncontrolled weeping.

XVIII

EACH COMES IN FOR HIS OWN

AYLIFFE remained with Mrs. Jocelyn for a week, then went away with her and spent a month at the great place on the North River. Mrs. Jocelyn needed her, the girl pleaded, and if any one could reconcile mother and son and bring them together after this estrangement it was she, Ayliffe, who could do it. Perhaps Ayliffe herself longed to be spared household talk, pity, sympathy, and explanations. Perhaps she dreaded Denise. But, at any rate, she considered it her duty to make Mrs. Jocelyn believe that Kenny had not committed an irredeemable offense; perhaps, indeed, that what he had done would be his salvation; for by this time Ayliffe knew a great deal about the little love affair which had actually been going on from the very first of Faith's coming to Belport. There could be no doubt about the reality of Faith's feel-

ing in the matter. It was the first stirring of the young girl's consciousness. And it was clear, too, that Kenny had taken a fancy to her from the moment they met.

The trouble was, Mrs. Jocelyn felt that her own wishes were sacred. If she could only be made to feel that the two young people loved each other and that their wishes were sacred too! There are times when every human being must feel its own war-rant from heaven, so Ayliffe pleaded. No one wanted Kenny false. It was something to have Kenny true. Bride and groom had spent the honeymoon cruising along the Maine coast. By the first of August Mrs. Jocelyn's mind had been brought to the point of receiving her runaway children. Ayliffe was so glad of this that it was certainly with little feeling of her own mortification that she stayed on for a few days to help break the ice of the new relations. Kenny was so shy of her that she could not have stayed longer, and was glad to go back to Belport.

She had had plenty of time for thinking over the past. It was a little curious how so much that had belonged to her old life

seemed to have come to an end. Of course she had the aunts still, the pets, the flowers, the work, the life. Kenny was gone, Synnott was gone. Above all, her old relation to Gale was quite over. Faithful and disinterested as he was, his marriage to Denise would alter everything. Polly had written that Denise was engaged to Mr. Gale, who had stayed on in Belpport all this time. She, Ayliffe, had not been missed. He had asked her once if she had a mind that could accept tonics.

She must show him that she was a new Ayliffe, — that she could brace herself, could learn. It was her apology that he had conspired with all the rest to make her existence too easy. The amendment of her life must be high, broad, and clear. If she could settle her affairs with her old guardian, — start fair again, — why, then she might at last get over this reaction of imagination, in which the enormous length of lonely years stretching out before her, the necessity of working on while encumbered with the futility of her old hopes and beliefs, seemed to press her down. She had borne being watched by Mr. Gale; his half

curiosity, his half amusement, had been a part of her experience. She had borne being watched by Denise. What she felt she could not bear was being watched by Mr. Gale and Denise together.

Thus some reluctance mingled with the pleasantness of coming home, and Ayliffe had to tell herself that henceforth the bitter must mingle with the sweet. If the aunts, in the very way they greeted her, in all they did, said, and looked, showed that they hushed their voices and trod softly in order to make it felt that they were disappointed for her, did she not deserve all the revenges of fate for her own sordidness? They were very tender, — they seemed to wish in every way to spare her. Polly led her over the place, showing her all the new growths, all the new splendors of bloom, bemoaning as well all the flowers that had blossomed while she had been away. Colette's and Colotte's freaks and misdemeanors were recounted, and Fido's various martyrdoms. Then came the village news. Mr. Gale had been to see them often. Sometimes he had come alone, sometimes Denise was with him. They had both been anxious for

Ayliffe's return. The aunts looked at each other a little tremulous. Some keen fellow-feeling seemed to pass between them. Denise that very day had left a note ; here it was. Ayliffe opened it, read it, crushed it in her hand. It was just what she had expected, but something seemed to hang over her, stupefying and deadening. Miss Honor and Miss Polly, watching the girl and feeling for her, could seem to see her struggling with the news she had received. With this sorrow of her own still fresh, still to be borne, with all the recollections of her too brief happiness, it was hard to bear the word that Denise was engaged.

Miss Polly bravely rushed into the breach and talked all through the evening meal, and by the time Richard Gale came, a little later, Ayliffe had had time to collect herself.

He drew her out into the light and looked at her. He had told her once that she always seemed to him a half touching little figure, and to-night he seemed to feel it strangely.

"I want to talk to you," he said. "It's a lovely night. Let us walk down the arbor path."

"I had a note from Denise," Ayliffe took pains to say, with a little glance up at him and a very wan little smile.

"Did you?" said Gale. "Then you know all about it and I need not tell you."

It was a relief to Ayliffe to feel that the matter was settled and accepted between them. It was a lovely night. In front of the house the trees stood like giants, but beneath their dark interlaced branches could be seen the red glow of the sunset, and above, the golden young moon between Jupiter and Venus. There was little light along the arbor path, but here and there through the network of leaves glittered a star. The moon-flowers were out; Miss Polly had called to Ayliffe that she must show them to Mr. Gale.

"I am glad to have you back," he said, breaking the silence as they walked on. "I was growing impatient."

"Mrs. Jocelyn seemed to need me." The words came soft, hesitating.

"Ayliffe!"

The call was imperious. He stopped short. "Let me say to you what I meant to say to you that day when I came to tell

you that I had realized on the mining shares. May I?"

"Of course. Why not?"

Her voice sounded strange and faint. The air was oppressive with the rich scents of the moon-flowers, and Gale waited until they had reached the summer house. Far behind was the house now, with its lighted windows against the gold in the west and the blaze of the planets. Here the evening was very silent. The tide was dropping away, and at times a long sigh sounded, the murmur of the water through the stillness.

He went on.

"I expected to be in time to say to you that you were free, free to appoint your own life, to choose your own destiny. What I had hated to think was that you were trying too hard to make your own way out of the maze. Now those mistakes are over. I want you to begin all over again."

Ayliffe had taken her seat behind the table where so often on summer afternoons she had made tea for Denise. Gale himself had taken up his stand close to Ayliffe, and when she put up her hand with a little gesture he caught it.

"I want you to begin and trust me," he said. "You have so distrusted me and fought against me!"

"If I did not trust you!" she flamed out, and then her voice died out in a queer little quaver. "Oh," she faltered, "now that everything is to be so different I want to tell you."

"Well, what, dear child?" he asked.

But having said so much she shrunk away, straightened herself against the rail, and then kept silent, as if finding confession intolerable. Gale recalled her words and tried to find meaning in them.

"Now that everything is to be so different?" he said. "Of course, there is to be no more Kenny Jocelyn, no great ready-made fortune, no splendid fate for you. But, Ayliffe, you did not love him."

"Love him? No, no, no—and yet I have said it to nobody else—I ought not to say it to you, Mr. Gale. It seems like a perfidy to him, but oh, I could have gone on my knees to Faith and thanked her for what she saved me from, and I did tell her that as she loved Kenny with all her heart and soul I was glad about it all, for Kenny

deserved to be loved, and not to have some miserable counterfeit of a feeling that " —

Gale, sweetly and powerfully thrilled, listened. He could see the young face, pale, agitated, yet nobly earnest in the light which streamed from the west.

"You say," she went on, "that you want me to begin over again. I do want to begin over again. I feel as if I could never be happy any more, that I do not deserve to be happy, but I do want somehow to be better, and you will help me, will you not? You and Denise can help me."

Her words, her manner, her whole look set Gale thrilling. She looked up at him.

"Denise wrote me your news," she said, making ready to show him that she was ready to trust him the more just because of his secret.

"My news?" he repeated. "What news?"

She laughed slightly.

"Denise is coming over to-morrow morning to tell me about her engagement. It seemed so indiscreet to give you my congratulations to-night."

"Congratulations? Surely, Ayliffe"—

He stopped, amazed. "Why, it's Coulson that Denise has consented to marry, Geoffrey Coulson."

He still held her hand in his warm grasp, but at this new leap in the pulses he dropped it.

"Listen to me, Ayliffe," he said. "If you have ever believed for one moment that I care about Miss Alden, it shows that you can know nothing of what you have been to me. Ever since you were a girl of fourteen that face of yours has been in my dreams. I have lived with the thought of you, slept with it, worked with it and on the strength of it. If I knew all the time that you were just a little hostile, I felt it to be only fair. You had to fight your own battle. I was the enemy encompassing you, besieging you, trying to get into the very citadel of your heart. If I am anything, it is you who have made me. I have said to myself at times that you were not for me, that I must live without you, yet I knew that I could not live without you, — that warmth, fragrance, life itself was only in being near you. What folly I talk, for, Ayliffe, you know very well that I offered

myself to you once before, and then, timid, disbelieving in myself, I seemed to be offering only a stone."

He paused a moment. Ayliffe had listened confused, her head in a whirl. Denise nothing to Gale! Denise engaged to Geoffrey Coulson! She moved uneasily.

"What is it?" he demanded. "Do I try you too much?"

"I am thinking of Denise. I remember the night on the yacht you were talking with her."

"Oh, yes, we were talking. She was telling her little history; she was telling me, too, what she felt more and more it was to lead up to, — Denise and I have talked a great deal. Do you suspect me of unfaith? Ask her if at the very beginning of our acquaintance she did not accuse me of being in love with you? I was in love with you, desperately, Ayliffe, and there was a certain ease in feeling that she understood me. Not only understood me but encouraged me — for she has told me more than once lately that since you are free I must claim you, hold you! Not passively, — but in stern and earnest determination. For she says, Ayliffe,

—is it not a meanness and a subterfuge for me to use her insight, — that actually you have loved me, a little, all this time.”

He had taken her hand once more. He had drawn her to her feet. He was looking straight in her face.

“Is it true?” he asked.

He did not wait for the answer, but kissed her lips.

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